

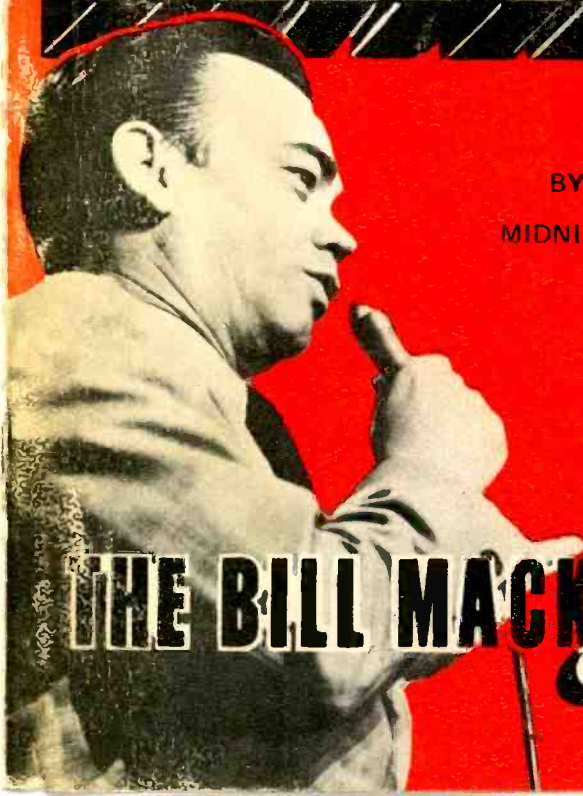
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SPINS AND NEEDLES

BY RADIO'S
MIDNIGHT COWBOY

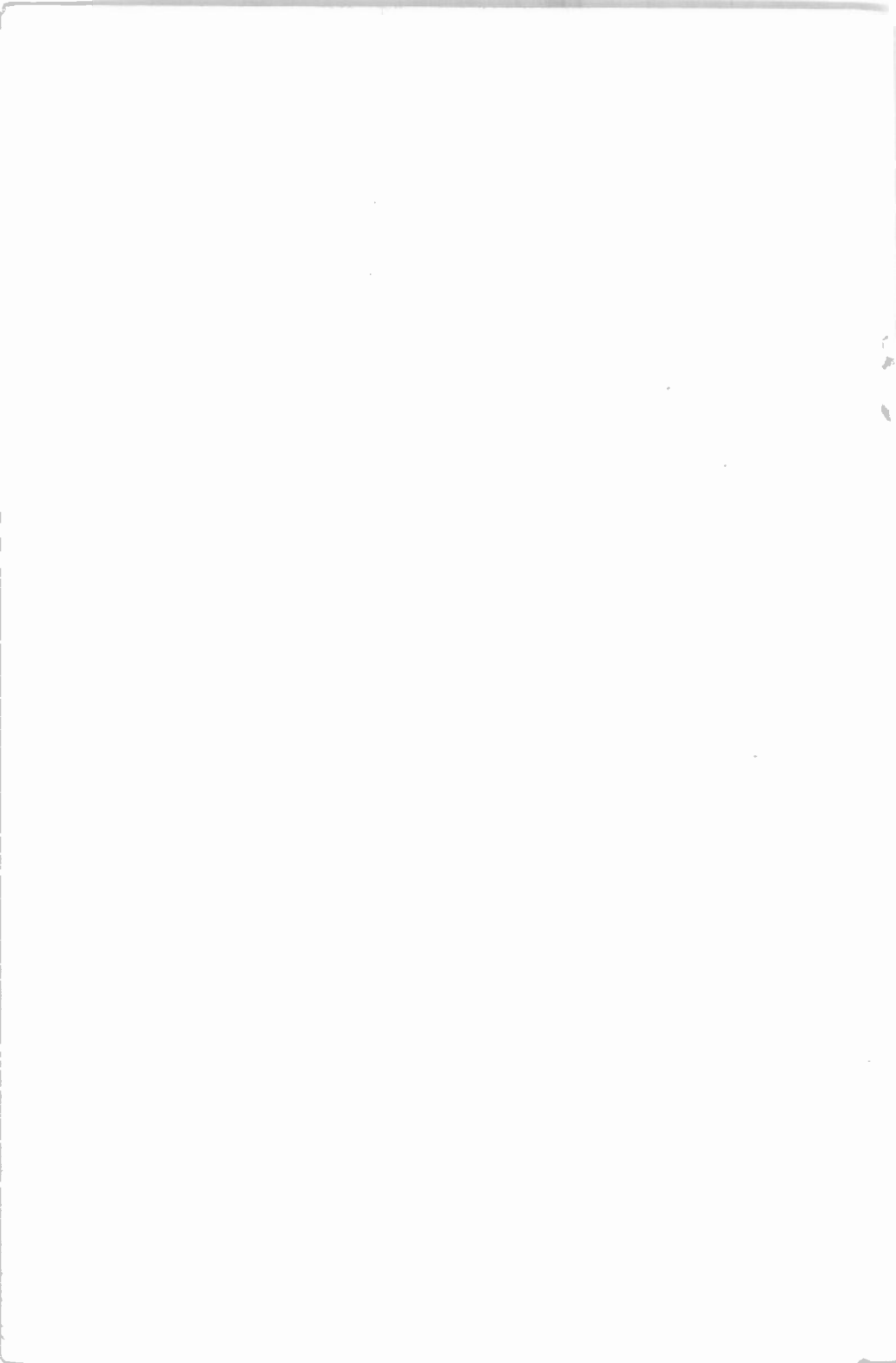


THE BILL MACK *Story*



VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



SPINS
AND
NEEDLES



My favorites! My GRANDPA and GRANNIE SECHRIST, of Wheeler, Texas.



"TILDA" with my MOM and DAD. I was "BLESSED with the BEST!"

SPINS AND NEEDLES
BY
BILL MACK
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SPINS AND NEEDLES

By Bill Mack
"Radio's Midnight Cowboy"

Dedicated to the Knights of the Road
And to those who make their music!



SPINS AND NEEDLES

CHAPTER ONE

In the world of big business there is absolutely no one who is more sure of what he is doing, more sold on his profession and more knocked out on himself as the zenith of contribution to his fellow man than the disc jockey. The disc jockey (known to many as simply the d.j.), comes in many forms, fashions and styles, including plump with thinning hair, skinny with loads of pompous hair, fat with no hair, or an intermixture of any and all. Most generally speaking, the disc jockey is easily recognizable in a crowd via his self-confidence, suave mannerisms, distinctive and deliberate voice, and the most gorgeous girl in the group attached to his arm and idolizing his every gesture and well-informed word. The fact that he only met the girl after his air shift that morning and that she came to the get-together with him after he had promised her a half dozen Glen Campbell albums and eight Merle Haggard albums which he had hiped from the Capitol Records man is not obvious to those standing near him inhaling his Man Of War cologne and gasping over his tailored cloth. The mere peasant may never know that the huge and glistening Cadillac that brought him and his date to the affair was presented to His Excellence through the faith of his sponsor and the nerve of the General Motors Acceptance Company and may return to his sponsor the minute his 26.8 rating in Pulse drops to a normal 10.6. Not only will the car go back to the sponsor should such a catastrophe occur, the girl will take her albums, snub her nose at him and return to her mama, his friends will gossip about his failure and the clothing sponsor will de-thread him of his garments. His entire life is based on his ratings and King Kilowatt will work his voice to the bone in order to protect his rating importance and self-respect. After all, who wants to toil in order to be idolized by the masses?

The working conditions for the disc jockey vary according to the radio station facilities, the manager, program director, and co-workers. There are exceptions of course, but the station manager is most easily recognized by his fur-covered wife, his facsimile of a smile, gentle handshake, tin ear and total disrespect when it comes to a wage increase. As a matter of fact, the mere mention or hint of a

raise in salary may bring sincere tears to his eyes and a quick reference to the hard times being pressed upon the radio station because of the lack of sponsors, sponsors slow in paying their bills to the station or a mother in Wisconsin who is dying of a liver ailment and is costing him every spare penny in medical bills. In a severe case of dropping the subject, the manager may even threaten taking his own life because his children are starving and his wife is going to have to go to work in the station's bookkeeping department in order to make ends meet and meet the employees payroll. (It seems the station's bookkeeper is always in danger of losing his or her job, but, if you will notice, is always the last to get the familiar axe. If it is a female bookkeeper the reason is obvious. If it is a male bookkeeper you can rest assured that he is the carrier of employee rumors, to the boss, and also is well aware, with figures to prove it, where the boss spends his "moonlighting" money, along with her apartment number, and where he lied a fraction on his last income tax. You will also notice that the bookkeeper is the first and often the only person the manager speaks to when he arrives at the premises in the morning.) Station managers seldom attend the annual Christmas parties.

The Program Director (Program manager, Manager of Broadcast Matter, etc.) is the easiest to spot in the radio station. He is usually an ex-best-pal who used to roar with laughter with you while talking about the manager's stupidity and the owner's wife's bulging figure when you were both simple disc jockeys. Suddenly, he becomes the expert in the broadcasting industry, shames you for laughing at the boss's wife's figure ("You shouldn't laugh at her. She's a great lady. She's a good friend of my wife. We party a lot with her and the boss") and threatens to fire you if you refer to the manager as stupid ("He's a very brilliant man. I only hope I know as much about management as he does when I'm his age.") You will also notice that he and the manager coffee together a lot and seem to be talking about whichever disc jockey is on the air at the time. They also make it obvious to the disc jockey that they are discussing him. This act is most popular during rating period, when the disc jockey's wife is about to have a baby, when the disc jockey has just gone into hock for a new car or house or when the disc jockey is about to ask for a raise in salary. Many disc jockeys have been known to blow their

cool after witnessing the Program Director / Manager discussion about him and have offered to take a cut in salary instead of asking for a raise ("Gee, Boss, You shouldn't pay me so dang much money. I'd nearly work here for nothin'. By the way, your wife sure has a beautiful figure. I wish she'd talk to my wife about her beauty secret because my wife has the bulgiest figure in town, Ha Ha!") The Program Director will also scream at the disc jockey about the lousy music he is playing even though it's the same music HE used to play when he was one of the boys and will fire the disc jockey when he finds the Jack Daniel bottle behind the album rack where, when the two of them were co-strugglers, they used to hide it after sneaking a swig. The Program Director also manages to drag five or ten bucks from the disc jockey as a contribution toward the boss's Christmas present ("Give from the heart, man. After all, the boss has been damn good to us this year and we owe him a hell of a lot.") The disc jockey usually ends up donating twenty-five dollars toward the gift and volunteering his wife to baby-sit for the boss's kids during the Christmas party and New Year's Eve. Should the Program Director be doing a regular radio show, the announcers are expected to rave to him about his program each day, ("Gee, Chief, you're great. I wish I had a voice like yours. You're a real pro, man!") The Program Director also informs the disc jockey that he's to keep the control room clean and to never take coffee cups or coke bottles into the studio.

The Chief Announcer, should this dying breed be found, is exactly like the Program Director except for a smaller paycheck. He is usually after the Program Director's job.

Next to the Station Manager, and in some cases even more important to watch, is the private secretary. The private secretary is always a tall and mysterious divorcee who usually dresses in black with a gold or silver pin attached to her garment, and loves only Frank Sinatra records. She constantly downgrades the disc jockey for his selection of music and, when not busy serving the boss his coffee and building up his ego, spends the rest of her working day shuffling through papers and sneering at the office peons. She never speaks to the disc jockey except when notifying him that one of his checks was returned to the station marked "Insufficient Funds" or that his wife has called to inform him that her mother is coming in for the

holidays and that he was to pick her up at the bus terminal immediately after his air shift. These tidbits of information are usually delivered to the d.j. with an evil giggle just as he is introducing a record by Buck Owens (whom she detests). The private secretary, next to the bookkeeper, can pinpoint more of the boss's weaknesses and damaging secrets than anyone else in his employ. Should a d.j. walk into the boss's office unexpectedly, which may be his final act at the station, he may notice the manager nuzzling the private secretary. This is usually followed by two statements by the head man; "She makes me think of my daughter" and "You're fired".

The private secretary only attends the annual Christmas party when the boss is present.

Now the station switchboard operator. This species of womanhood no one person can understand and no one person knows for certain where she came from. She is usually a teenager (average age 19 years) who flunked out as a Kelly girl and who has her sights on one of the disc jockeys (in some cases any of the disc jockeys). The identifying habits of the switchboard operator include taking the time to paint her nails, all the fingers and toes, before answering the telephone, putting through all trivial calls to the control room while the d.j. is on the air ("Play a song for my husband - and tell him to get the hell home!" or "Do you have Roger Miller's home phone number? I wrote a song I think he would like to record.") and leaving urgent messages in your box, which you never inspect, just before she leaves for the five o'clock cocktail with the morning d.j. ("Your wife called. She had an eight pound baby boy this morning. Congrats, Stud! Love, and see you tomorrow, Molly" or "Your brother called while you were on the air and said your car had been stolen and wanted to know what he should do. Sorry, Stud! Love and see you tomorrow, Molly.") Another unforgivable habit the switchboard operator has is informing your wife that you can't talk because (giggle) a gorgeous sexy-sounding girl is on the phone with you. ("She's been on the phone with him for over an hour. She calls every day about this time. Should I have the stud call you when he is through?") The switchboard operator loves Buck Owens and often suffers from halitosis. She usually drives a red Mustang with dents in the left fender.

The Chief Newsmen is most noticeable because of his mustache, dark eyes, immaculate clothes, and the way he shakes his head in disgust to the other newsmen when your show feeds through to the newsroom. He also sends memos to you when you are ten seconds late in getting his news on the air and raises the devil when you play a Buck Owens record just before he infiltrates the airways. He also has a habit of turning a five-minute newscast into eight minutes when he gets carried away. This is especially true if he wears headphones and can hear his own pear-shaped tones (He often smiles with delight when he hears himself). The newsmen always concludes his newscast with what he considers a funny story and expects to see you roaring with laughter when he looks at you through the soundproof glass in the control room. Refraining from convulsive laughter may indicate another memo from him (What's the matter, boy? Trouble with the little wife today? Smile, Boy, Smile! Regards, Ed.)

The station janitor or security guard rate just above the disc jockey in respect, vacation time, insurance benefits and wages. He usually speaks to the d.j., asks about his family (while asking for a five dollar loan), tells you his wife listens to you regularly, and is friendly. He also likes Buck Owens.

Last, but certainly not least, is the music director. He is easy to identify due to the fact that he usually has more spending money and the best looking car on the station staff. The music director is usually a prime time disc jockey who is always smiling. The biggest smiles come at Christmas time when he is smothered with gifts from the record companies. These gifts usually include Jack Daniel, record players, tape decks, portable radios, trips to Hawaii, tickets to the cotton bowl game, cameras, a turkey, a new suit, a trip to Nashville for the taping of HEE HAW, a personal handshake from Buck Owens and a blonde. The music director, like the manager, usually has a tin ear and bases his "play list" in the control room on what artists or record labels have been the most congenial with him during the past few weeks. He is happiest when a new, struggling, beautiful female artist comes to visit him (behind closed doors) and discuss why her record isn't being played on the station. The music director is invited to Bakersfield frequently. Buck Owens is usually No. 1 on his charts.

CHAPTER TWO

Ever since I was twelve years old and had idolized the radio heroes I had wanted to be a radio announcer. The "Wheaties" announcer on "Jack Armstrong" THE ALL AMERICAN BOY knocked me out. I used to beat it home from Shamrock Jr. High to find out if Tonto had hocked the Lone Ranger's mask, if Dick Tracy's secret wrist radio had failed him, and if Superman had finally been found out by Lois Lane. I always thought, even in grade school, that Superman was a bomb-out in the love department. I could never understand why he didn't take advantage of the idolizing Lois Lane. I thought Clark Kent, who was Superman in disguise (or vice versa), was very odd. Lois Lane, who worked with Clark Kent, didn't care for Clark and, what made matters worse, Clark didn't seem to care for Lois. I also thought Lois was very stupid in not recognizing Kent was really Superman. All he did was take off his glasses, his hat and suit, put on his long handles with the big S on the chest, and put a spit curl in his hair. It also dawned on me that Superman could never have his suit cleaned for fear that the lady at the laundry would find him out. He must have had atrocious under-arm odor. Captain Marvel, Batman and Robin had this same problem.

My mother and dad weren't really enthralled with the idea of my becoming a radio announcer, since my mother wanted me to become a Baptist preacher and my dad wanted me to quit laying out all Saturday night when I was in Shamrock High.

Unfortunately for my folks, by the time I had become a Junior in high school I had also become hooked on broadcasting. My principal, Edward Burkhalter, had given me the happy task of announcing the school's activities on the public address system. While announcing the boxing matches and football games and hearing my voice echoing through the stadiums and gyms through the big horn speakers, I had noticed, even in those tender years, that the females of Shamrock High went for the big mouths of elementary announcing. I used to take Joye Fry into the sound booth with me.

My dad informed me that I could pursue my broadcasting desires only if I attended college as my mother had dreamed of since my childhood. I think mom also had lingering hopes that I might still

go into the Baptist ministry although she was having enough trouble getting me out of bed Sunday Mornings for church. She should have known by my failing algebra grades in high school that I would be a wipe out in college.

High School was great fun for me. I had snowed most of the teachers with a gift of gab that I accomplished through practicing to be an announcer behind closed doors at home. This, I believe, was also a contributing factor toward my getting the lead roles in both my Junior and Senior high school plays. I was having so much fun in high school, dating the girls and sneaking smokes in the boiler room of Shamrock High, that my grades were terrible.

I was borrowing the school's tape recorder through the kind-heartedness of Mr. Burkhalter and taking the bulky device home with me over the weekends where I would make "custom" party tapes and sell them to my high school buddies for three to five dollars apiece, depending on how daring the tapes were. I was picking up quite a bit of pocket loot via this back street operation until I left one of the tapes in the tape machine pocket and Mr. Burkhalter severed the loan-out agreement with me. It also ended my love affair with Joye Fry when one of my buddies played her one of my five dollar "dynamite" tapes I had sold him.

Since my loan-out credit with Shamrock High had been severely damaged, I talked Wayne Carver, a straight A student, into borrowing the school's 16 MM sound movie projector during the summer preceding my Senior year. I had dreamed of an ingenious idea toward pocketing more money, which consisted of renting feature movies out of Dallas for a week's run (These were mostly Buster Crabbe Westerns, Charlie Chan Mysteries, Three Stooges Comedies and a twelve chapter episode of the famed Flash Gordon Serial) and utilizing the school's gratis sound projector, taking the movies to Dodson, Texas on Monday night, Sammorwood on Tuesday nights, Kelton, Texas on Thursday nights (Wednesday was prayer meeting night and we couldn't book it) and Magic City, Texas on Friday nights throughout the sultry summer months in the Texas panhandle.

We also had a double feature, and the Flash Gordon Cliffhanger caught the attention of the Texas farmers and their wives and children. The crowds were tremendous. We charged the adults 75 cents and the children 25 cents. About the third week of

MACCARVE MOBILE MOVIES (named after Mack and Carver) near-tragedy struck in Dodson, Texas when a tornado blasted out of the clouds in the Middle of a Tex Ritter Western, and the crowd went wild, ripping the portable movie screen which Wayne had also borrowed from Shamrock High. Wayne and I tossed the projector, film, and remnants of the screen into my Ford and struck out toward home on the Dodson dirt road which was under construction. About eight miles from Wellington, Texas the torrential rain caught us and my Ford was stuck in the soggy mess. Wayne and I hiked the eight miles to Wellington where I awoke my uncle John Sechrist and we bummed a bed from him after devouring practically all the food in his kitchen. It didn't dawn on us until the next afternoon, when John took us back to my stuck vehicle, that we hadn't locked the door to the back seat where the projector had been placed on the floor, and that some rowdy Dodson boys had lifted it. One of the men on the construction gang had seen the misfits take the projector out of my car and described the villains and their car to Uncle John.

Uncle John combed the area for two or three hours, checking every farmhouse for a car similar to the one described by the road hand, until, luckily, we found the car parked near a front porch of a farm house about three miles from where my car had been bogged down. The projector was sitting on the front porch near three huge farm boys who were gazing at us while eating a yellow meated watermelon and spitting the seeds on the ground. They remained silent until Uncle John informed them that the projector was ours and that we had come for it, "Much obliged, boys, for lookin' after this thing for us. We'll get it out of your way." said Uncle John.

The three mountains arose from their haunches and spitting the unswallowed bits of watermelon on Uncle John's feet, uttered, "Th' Hell you say!"

One of the Dodson beasts began slugging Uncle John while pounding his bald head against the hood of the car. The second burly character was chasing Wayne around the old frame house while cussing him with every panting breath. The third monster was trying to break the window glass of the car and get at me. I had locked myself in. He would threaten and cuss me and I yelled back at him that I was on his side and didn't blame them for raising Hell with Wayne and Uncle John and that they could keep the projector as far

as I was concerned. (It had crossed my mind that Carver had borrowed the projector and I wouldn't be responsible. I also wanted to keep my teeth.) Uncle John finally freed himself from his attacker and ran to his side of the car trying to get in only to find I had locked him out. He pleaded but I wouldn't open. His butcher and the one who had been after me, and whom I had soft talked into being my friend after whacking any and all allegiance to Uncle John and Wayne, took after poor old Unc. One of the bruisers was chucking rocks at Uncle John, pelting his bald head which was red under the hot summer sun, while Uncle John continued to run and plead, around the house and over the yard. The third bully had Wayne on the ground near an old cistern and was pounding him in the face and belly. He tried to pry Wayne from the ground to drop him in the old well but Wayne held on for dear life. Throughout all this ordeal I sat in the oven-hot car and listened to Blaine Cornwell's Top Ten on KWFT in Wichita Falls on Uncle John's car radio.

After what seemed an eternity, the boys' dad came riding up to the house on a tractor and ended the scuffle by lashing the boys with a wet rope he had yanked out of the old well. Uncle John repossessed the projector, after paying the farmer five dollars storage charges, and finally persuaded me to open the car doors for him and Wayne only to discover that the battery was dead from my listening to Blaine Cornwell on the car radio. We had to pay the farmer another five to pull the car with his tractor to start it. While the farmer was pullin, the three jolly giants were throwing cans and rocks at the car.

As we drove back to my bogged buggy, I said, "That Blaine Cornwell knocks me out!"

The reaction from Uncle John and Wayne was stone silence.

To those who missed final chapters of FLASH GORDON after MACCARVE MOBIL MOVIES was dissolved after a clash of partners (Carver took the projector back to the high school and my dad put my Ford in the garage for the remainder of the summer) FLASH destroyed the evil Ming empire and won the beautiful Dale. I saw it on television several years later.

CHAPTER THREE

My departure for West Texas State was similar to an old John Hodiak movie, with relatives gathering around me, slapping me on the back and wishing me success in my new venture. My mother was broken in tears ("Write me every few days, Honey!" and "Take care of yourself and eat right. Mama loves you.") as she kissed me goodbye before I got into the car with my dad for the 100 mile trip to Canyon.

I was, at this time, really hung up on a beautiful little girl from Shamrock and I had my dad drive me by her house for the farewell kiss. I had visions of a soldier going to the front as I walked to her door on that brisk morning and could imagine the deep, dark, period of mourning she must be going through as she awaited my knock at the door. We had been going steady for a long time and I was trying to think of the words of impact I should bestow on her to ease the pains of farewell and, at the same time, leave enough hurt so that she wouldn't forget me ("The time has come to say goodbye, Darlin'. You can have my Mills Brothers albums. When you play **YOU ALWAYS HURT THE ONE YOU LOVE** think of me. Should dad and I have an accident on the way to Canyon and I become crippled, find somebody new. I'll understand. Here's a bullet to bite on to deaden the pain of farewell.")

I knocked on her door, wore what I thought was a Van Johnson expression, and waited to be greeted with tear-soaked eyes. Instead, her father opened the door and asked, "What are you doin' here this early in the morning?"

I informed the hardened soul that I had come to say goodbye to his daughter, and heard him mutter to himself, "Thank the Good Lord."

As I entered the house, I was surprised to hear happy music coming from the direction of my steady's bedroom. Instead of a black veil of mourning, the delightful one pranced into the living room wearing pin curls and a flannel robe.

"It's that time," I said.

She looked at her watch and replied, "I'm going to be late for school."

Astonished that she could be so brave at such a gray period in

her life, I took her hand into mine and whispered, "Be brave." At this time I heard her mother yell from the kitchen informing her that her biscuits were ready and she was going to be late for school. I kissed her goodbye and headed toward the door still puzzled by her courage. It was then that I noticed a picture of Ray York, my competition in the LOVE department at Shamrock High School, now occupied the frame that normally boasted mine, on the piano. I also noticed that I didn't really resemble Van Johnson. Tyrone Power, maybe.

I checked into Stafford Hall, the boys' dormitory on the campus of West Texas State, to discover that Mr. Snell, a speech professor (I had planned to major in speech), was in charge of the dorm. I met some of the boys, many of whom would share some exciting experiences with me in nearby Amarillo, and put on the act of Mr. Chips seeking the knowledge of the institution.

West Texas State failed to excite me during the next few weeks. I slept through Freshman assembly and my first three classes the first day of the official college year and, after failing to attend the history class for a full week, the dean asked me to come to his office. As I remember, he was very kind and understanding, asking me about Shamrock, my goal in life, and my grades. He also informed me that if I missed another class, purposely, I would be kicked out of my Alma Mater. I thanked him for his understanding, his opinion, his advice and, while glancing at a pretty Freshman girl from the window, shook his hand as he excused me.

I struck up an immediate friendship with the owner of a small record shop near the campus. This friendship was based on the fact that I was spending my dad's money on records by the dozens. My dad thought I was spending the money on books and college supplies, and was quite slow in catching up with me. I borrowed a tape machine from the record shop, informing the owner that I had full intentions to buy it if it met with my approval. I loaded the machine into my Ford, for which my dad was also supplying fuel, and hauled it to Stafford Hall where I set it up in my room and continued practicing my announcing.

I was in complete disagreement with my broadcasting professor at the college because he was teaching the radio class to address the radio audience as "Ladies and Gentlemen". I thought that this was

old hat due to the fact that probably less than 75% of the American listening audience was either a lady or gentleman and, if they were like me, resented being referred to as such. I also noticed that the professor had a high-pitched voice, strictly prohibited from most radio stations at that time. He also stated that Arthur Godfrey, whom I admired so much, was breaking every rule of broadcasting. Even my trivial mind, which was no match for mathematics, derived at a fair conclusion that if Godfrey was earning over \$150,000.00 per year and the prof was earning approximately \$15,000.00 per year, the professor had to be barking (in high-pitched tones) up the wrong money tree. With these figures in mind, I began skipping my radio class.

My room in Stafford Hall became the meeting place of my friends because of my big stack of records and the fact that I was hauling party beverages back to my room after my frequent trips to Amarillo. I would hide the goodies behind my books, which I never moved, and break the seal when the gang met in my room for our nightly poker games which my dad also financed.

One night I pulled my first serious blunder. I had carefully made up a taped radio show utilizing my record player and the tape machine. The program was about one hour in length. I placed a radio on top of the tape recorder and, with in-point timing, started the machine just before my buddies came in for the poker game. They had never heard me announce and thought the radio was on with some bomb-out disc jockey from Amarillo. They were paying little attention to the voice, but were enjoying the music as they shuffled the cards. I had commercials, weather and music on the tape. I even included a news bulletin about fifty minutes deep, which proclaimed that the Russians had just bombed Oak Ridge, Tennessee and Long Beach Harbor. Before I could correct the practical joke, all the boys had dashed from the room to call their parents, collect, and inform them that they were volunteering for their respective choices in the United States Armed Forces. Even Mr. Snell, the chief honcho of Stafford, informed his wife that he was taking his army reserve uniform out of mothballs. By the time I had giggled my apologies to my buddies, the news of the fictitious bombings had spread throughout Canyon, and thanks to some uncontrollable volunteers, to sections of Amarillo. Snell called me into his office, chewed me

out good, and warned me that one more practical joke would mean vacating the premises. My campus buddies, most of whom were potential draft dodgers, forgave me, and we broke another seal before starting a new poker game to assure our friendship.

My nightly habit, much to the dissatisfaction of my Stafford roommate, was going to sleep while listening to KELO Radio, Clint, Texas (with broadcasting facilities in Old Mexico). I received my joys in listening to the broken-english announcer advertising baby chicks, Bibles, and assorted goods with the "send no money" mail order pitch. I heard him announce that for \$2.98 you could order a "genuine facsimile of a diamond ring" that he "dared you to detect from the original". With this in mind, I struck upon a new idea for a hilarious practical joke.

Damon and Raymond Harris were the burly twin brothers from West Texas who had decided to brighten their knowledge by attending West Texas State. The bruisers, though twins, were not compatible. Damon had an almost uncontrollable crush on a freshman girl named Lillian and was constantly sending her little gifts of love, such as cologne, flowers and candy, trying with little results to win her. He finally persuaded her, after spending untold amounts of money on tidbits, to date him. Raymond resented the romance since Damon had spent part of Raymond's loot on the girl. Damon didn't particularly like me because of the fact I played my Floyd Tilman records at high volume late at night while he was studying his animal husbandry and the latest art in slaughtering a hog. He never participated in the nightly poker games and would sneer at the rest of us when passing the room on the way to the shower.

I took advantage of the "send no money" offer on XELO and ordered the simulated diamond ring, along with instructions to send it C.O.D. to Lillian in Damon's name. The ring arrived at Lillian's dorm about the same time as Damon, and she told him, in her best Lubbock language, to get lost. Needless to say, this broke the heart of the hog butcher and, putting two and two together, he derived at me as the answer to his crushed castles. He headed back to Stafford Hall and my room with fire in his eyes. Damon, though slow in most matters, was fast in intruding on the poker game and charging at me with hands that had been exercised daily through the chores of shearing goats. Raymond, his devoted brother, held him off of me

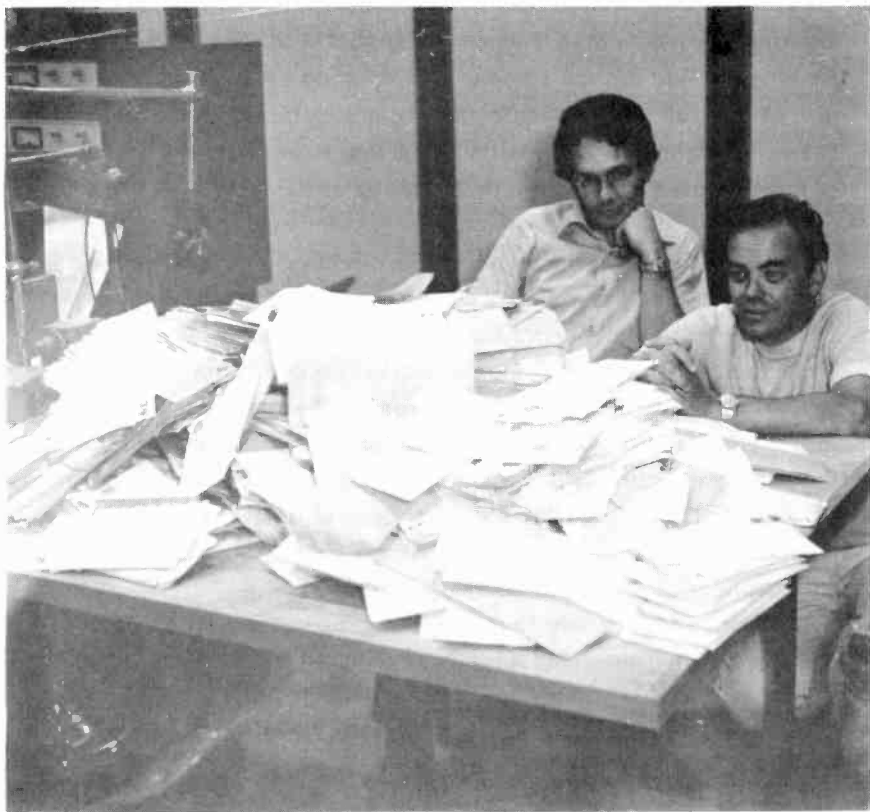
(since Raymond was winning in the poker game) and proceeded to whip Damon with one of my Ernest Tubb albums. In the meantime, Bugs Clemons, a fellow Stafford Hall citizen, and I had slipped out of the hall in order to keep dates with a couple of innocent creatures at Bob's Hamburger Inn.

In order to clear Damon from my conscience, the next day I sent him a forged telegram, asking him to appear at the army induction center in Amarillo. A few days later he nervously hitchhiked to the city and, after a little persuasion, joined the U.S. Army.

Bored with college and seeking new adventures via practical jokes, Bugs and I spent the entire afternoon making a dummy and wrapped a broom with cloth in order to pull off an old trick I had enjoyed while in Shamrock High. We hid beside a hill near Stafford Hall on the Canyon/Amarillo highway after it had become pitch dark late one winter night. As a car would pass, we would hit the rear fender with the cloth-covered broom and toss the dummy onto the highway. Most of the cars would stop, thinking they had hit someone, only to discover the dummy and two college Joes folded up in hysterical laughter. However, you would be surprised to see how many motorists would see the dummy in the road and thinking they had passed over a pedestrian, would whip off at high speed. After a couple of hours the joke had become tiring and Bugs and I were about to go back to the dorm when we saw an unusually slow car rambling toward us. We decided to have one more bit of fun. I whacked the rear fender as hard as I could with the broom and Bugs tossed the dummy onto the highway. The car stopped in the middle of the road and we heard a woman inside screaming hysterically as the man behind the wheel pushed the car door open and ran back toward our dummy. Bugs and I doubled up with laughter. However, our facial expressions changed rapidly when we discovered that the driver was none other than old Prof. Snell. He had just returned from Amarillo where he had taken his wife for her weekly nerve treatment and was in no mood for jokes. He asked both Bugs and me to sever our homesteading at Stafford Hall within the week and no one could talk him into changing his mind. He also telephoned my dad and asked him to come to Canyon and discuss the problem with him and the dean.

My dad relieved me of my Ford. However, I did catch a glimpse of the "Shamrock Texan" before dad took off for the old home town. The headline read SHAMROCK TO HAVE ITS OWN RADIO STATION.

I decided to leave West Texas State and try my hand at broadcasting.



MERLE HAGGARD and FAN MAIL on WBAP

CHAPTER FOUR

I camped on the doorsteps of Radio Station KEVA in Shamrock while the carpenters were building, and I was a complete pest to the station manager, John Kennedy, begging for a chance to display my vocal wares with the station. Finally, in desperation for sleep, John promised me a "part time" job with the station. This, as any disc jockey will tell you, simply means that you will be utilized on a part time paycheck and will be expected to spend the rest of the working day performing the unenviable chores of cleaning the johns, running errands for the station, and standing by with a prayer for one of the full time Jocks to become incapable, by some freak of nature, of doing his job. The part-time disc jockey will pull any type of under-handed act on a full-time "master-of-the mouth" in order to get his job.

KEVA signed on the air on a brisk morning in early winter and I was one of the first d.j's to get a chance to thrill the masses of Shamrock citizens with my heretofore undiscovered talents. I was given the assignment of giving the market reports. Cupping my ears to my mouth with my hands, in order to hear my exciting vocal tones, I goofed through the market reports, treating each word as though it were pure gold. I knew I was a success when Jerry Berten, of Berten Drug, brought me a chocolate malt after my first broadcast. I stood in the lobby of KEVA waiting anxiously for the autograph seekers to arrive. They never showed.

After approximately two weeks of broadcasting on KEVA, the manager put me on a full time basis with the astounding salary of \$12.50 per week (which I was happy to get). I was given an early morning show and also a program that ran from four o'clock p.m. until sign-off each afternoon.

KEVA was a daytime station only, broadcasting from sunrise to sunset. I soon discovered that I was assigned those hours to work. However, I was happy to meet the challenge and began to look upon myself, even with my meager salary, as somewhat of a giant of the airwaves. I began listening to the big stations and the important disc jockeys, copying their style and presentation. My pop music shows, which were broadcast during the morning hours, sounded like the pop music shows out of KGNC Amarillo. At least they sounded that

way to me. KGNC titled their show "Platter Palace." My show was titled "Platter Castle." I began wearing what I considered the mod clothes and, with any luck, dating the prettiest girls in Shamrock. I purchased a 1948 Studebaker and roared around town with the secret feeling that I was the KILLOWATT KID, although it is obvious now that I was only soaking in my own self-esteem since John Cox, the city constable, still gave me my regular speeding tickets, and my credit at Sanders Men's Wear was in jeopardy. I gave periodic reviews of the movies as they changed at the Texas Theater (and the Liberty Theater, too, when they were within my high rating ratio). The Liberty showed mostly "B" class pictures and I only graced it with my presence when what I considered a passable picture was enjoying a run, although they charged me and my date the regular prices. More than once I was asked to leave the "Texas" because of unnecessary necking in the balcony. The manager wasn't impressed by the fact that I was the city's only authentic expert in the art of reviewing the works of Hollywood. I did, however, make a deal, underhandedly, with the Palomino Cafe whereby my date and I would be served choice hamburger steaks, complete with french fries, for mentions of their establishment on my morning show. This was my first taste of "payola" and lasted only a few weeks. The owner realized that my sly mentions weren't increasing his financial intake, and he severed the shady agreement. He did, however, offer me liver and onions instead of hamburger steaks, and I took him up on the offer until I discovered that the girl I was dating at the time was allergic to liver and broke out with a rash and fever blisters before I could get her to my favorite parking spot near Lela (a town located five miles west of Shamrock).

My salary was increased to twenty dollars a week after I had been with KEVA for about three months and began receiving a token of fan mail, some of which, I must admit, I was sending to myself. Along with the raise came the order from John Kennedy that I was to clean the John (we had only one) twice a day instead of the usual once-a-morning going-over. I always did these chores with a silent prayer that none of my adoring female fans would need to utilize the room while I was on my knees brushing the pottie. It was at this time that the owner's nephew, who was an engineer at the station, began making snide remarks about my restroom chores. I was positive that

he was jealous of my fan mail since he did a mid-day show of his own and never received a letter (It was also my daily chore to pick up the mail at the post office and I made certain that no one - and I mean NO ONE - received a fraction of the mail response that I enjoyed). He began referring to me as "John Boy" and I began calling him "the Chosen One". The nephew began pulling little tricks on me during my show, such as removing the fuses from the turntables, allowing them to refuse to start, and leaving me to the mercy of my limited adlibbing; and hiding my john-cleaning equipment, forcing me to scrub the neglected porcelain with whatever utensils I could find, (including my handkerchief) in order to please the manager before he arrived at the station.

My feud with the owner's nephew became serious and, in order to destroy his sovereign image, I struck upon an ingenious idea. I noticed that the Mid-day Wonder would rip and read his newscasts at the last minute, never taking the time to prepare them. Most of the time he would command me to bring the news to him during his show. With this thought in mind I prepared a fictitious newscast on the teletype paper and stored it in a hidden place, awaiting his command to "Bring me the news, John Boy". In a couple of days my big chance arrived.

The nephew ordered me to rip the news from the machine and bring it to him. Instead of the regular United Press release, I brought him my own rendition of earth-shattering events.

Not wanting to miss a second of the up-coming "news-of-the-Day", I ran to my Studebaker and turned on the radio to hear His Higness as he announced that the mayor of Los Angeles was being treated for hemorrhoids - Movie actress Lana Turner had eloped with Mickey Rooney and was honeymooning in Shamrock (This bit of fiendish news sent a stream of cars to Shamrock's leading motel and aroused one of our most reliable sponsors from a hideaway haven with his secretary) - There is a new way to apply fertilizer to your winter crops (after which he went into elaborate details of the wonders and manufacture of goat fertilizer).

After this hilarious gesture on my part, the nephew went screaming to his uncle, the station owner, and said that either the Killowatt Kid was to seek employment elsewhere, or HE would return his wife, the neice, to her proper uncle.

The station owner had a noticeable habit of blowing air onto his burning cigarette when he was nervous. He also invited his employee out for a cup of coffee when the poor soul was about to have his weekly paycheck removed from the company's records on a permanent basis.

I was invited out for a cup of coffee.

When I received my walking papers from KEVA my world collapsed. Gone were the nights of glory received by parading my beautiful self among the citizens of Shamrock. Gone were the nights of slipping into the radio station after closing time and listening to the new records I could look forward to playing on the next morning's show. Gone was the proud feeling of being the state's youngest expert on motion pictures and the prognostications of which pictures would be hits or misses showing at the Texas Theater (and, as I mentioned, occasionally at the Liberty). Gone were the moments of glory spent opening my thin package of fan mail and the often-sent packages of cookies from Mrs. Wall. Most heartbreaking, gone were the girls.

I was a "has been" at the age of eighteen.

I went to the Palomino Cafe and was treated like a mere citizen of Shamrock instead of being idolized by the blonde waitress. I was tempted to drown my sorrows in the 3-2 beer in Texola, Oklahoma (14 miles from Shamrock) but couldn't find Bill Setzler, my best pal, to accompany me on what I thought would be a self-inflicted drunken drive.

I got in my Studebaker for a sorrowful, lonely, drive around town, turned on the radio to Nelson King's nightly show out of Cincinnati, by accident (I didn't understand country music) and heard what I thought was the most mournful and, in its peculiar way, beautiful song I had ever heard. It hit me hard. It was MANSION ON THE HILL.

I was being introduced (without warning) to a man who was destined to change my entire future in radio.

Nelson King announced: "That was Hank Williams."

CHAPTER FIVE

With the help of my high school principal, Mr. Burkhalter, who had some kind of inside connection with the "Amarillo Globe News", I arranged for an audition with Radio station KLYN (CBS) in the panhandle city of Amarillo. Mr. "B", my girl friend from Shamrock, and I, whizzed up Highway 66 out of Shamrock to Amarillo, for the anxiously awaited audition. Mr. "B" kept prompting me on what to do during the tryout, my girl friend said she was praying for me to pass the audition, and I dozed off to sleep in the arms of the sweet thing completely filled with self-confidence that I would pass the thing with no problems. My fan mail, telephone calls and personal contact with my "adoring" masses while with my hometown station had given me a few moments of self-adoration, and much false assurance in myself.

We entered KLYN about ten o'clock and were met by the usual black-draped private secretary, typical of all of the larger stations, and she invited us to have a seat in the lobby to await the arrival of the manager, Jake Brown. I noticed immediately that this tall human fixture didn't particularly care for radio announcers and disc jockeys when she yanked the application papers from my hand.

"I was the morning Jock at KEVA" I said, trying to impress her. "In case you don't know where KEVA is located - it's in Shamrock."

She asked, "Where is Shamrock?"

Apparently, she hadn't been listening to my shows.

The program director of KLYN pranced into the lobby in time to rescue me from Vampira and, peering through his horn-rimmed glasses, asked me to come into the studio for my long-awaited audition. I noticed that he resembled Groucho Marx, and smelled of outdated cologne. To encourage me, he immediately informed me, while handing me an audition script, that my chances of passing the audition were practically nil. While chomping his Wrigley's Spearmint and snapping his fingers he also eyed my girl friend, although it was most obvious that his wishes were much bigger than his capabilities. He winked at her. He also winked at me. Typical of most program directors he was, without a doubt, in dire fear that I might pass the audition and, catching him out of the manager's office, someday

replace him.

"Read the commercials slowly," he ordered.

"All Right," I replied.

"And just because everyone in the studio will be listening, don't let it bother you, sweetie," he lisped.

"All right", I replied.

He winked at me again as Jake Brown, the manager, walked into the observation booth to catch my trial.

"Darlin" said the program director, "The boss and I will be in the observation booth; and when I give you the sign with my little finger, you do the best you can do. I must inform you again, however, that your chances of passing the audition are slim."

He giggled somewhat slyly as he bunny-hopped into the booth.

I wiped the sweat from my brow as I read the commercials, ad-lib tips and news to myself while awaiting the boy wonder's signal to begin. Finally, after keeping me in the hot box for about ten minutes, he waved his pinkie at me, informing me it was time to begin.

After I had completed the audition, I was asked by the tall private secretary to go into the manager's office, have a seat, and wait for Jake. I bowed my head and did as instructed. After what seemed an eternity, Jake Brown entered the room.

"You're from Shamrock, huh," he asked.

I told him I was.

"Do you like to do news?"

"Yes."

"We don't have an opening for a disc jockey," he said, "We also have a short budget to work on. Are you married?"

I informed him that I wasn't.

"We need a newsman," said Jake. You have a good voice, though limited, and I think we might be able to use you in news."

"I'd like a whack at it," I said. Deep down, I hated doing news, realizing that every newsman I had ever known was a perpetual gripe.

"It pays \$55.00 per week. The job is yours if you want it," said Jake.

In what was to be one of KLYN's biggest boo boos, I was made news director at the age of eighteen.

I loved Amarillo. I had a small apartment on the second floor of a home owned by an elderly German couple that reminded me of a World War II movie. The bedroom boasted a bay window and each noon I whiffed the aroma of immaculate cooking coming from the kitchen. Every Friday my mouth watered to the smell of fish frying. Several times a week I was invited by the old German lady, speaking in broken English, to join the couple at mealtime. I noticed that outside of the prayer of Thanks to begin the meal, very little conversation took place at meal time.

There were many occasions when the old lady would rap on my door with the words, "Wake up! Der radio station called! You are late to verk!" This usually took place after I had been out on a late date the night before with Marla, a girl I had developed a tremendous crush on. I had betrayed my Shamrock sweetheart, with whom I was going steady, for this delightful creature. Marla resembled Liz Taylor. Because of her, and wanting to add class to my broadcasting position, I had gone in hock up to my backside for a 1950 model canary yellow Buick convertible. I was a familiar figure to the Amarillo cops as I whizzed through the chilly city on those winter nights with Marla sitting close beside me. She, like me, had become addicted to the songs of Hank Williams and we would go to Cooper and Melin daily and listen to Hank Williams records. (I couldn't hype records from the local distributor since KLYN featured only pop music). More than once the old German landlady caught me trying to sneak Marla into my humble abode late at night.

"NEIN!" she would shout. "Dos iss not Christian!"

Marla was becoming very serious and would accompany me to my nightly newscasts on KLYN, holding my hand as I informed the city of various robberies, rapes and murders. She had a delightful habit of biting my ear while I delivered the weather forecast. I gave the sexiest weather on radio. Zales Jewelry sponsored my 6:00 P.M. newscast and I was beginning to give serious thought to talking to Mr. Barron, the Zales manager, about trading out an engagement ring. This thought usually entered my mind after the ear biting. My manhood was tested Monday through Saturday nights during the weather on KLYN by this heavenly body and my job was becoming less and less important to me. I began to rip the news just a few minutes before air time and would present it cold. I would take

Marla into the newsroom with me and we would kiss to the sexie sound of the United Press International news machines. My delinquency in the preparation of my news was becoming obvious to everyone who listened - including Jake Brown and the program director. One night Jake crashed into the newsroom and rudely interrupted a compounded bit of loving between us and I was ordered, with the threat of losing my employment, to leave Marla in the Buick while I did my news. My castles crumbled at this thought and somehow my weather didn't sound the same without the ear nibbling.

Typical of the fathers of the girls I had dated throughout the years, Marla's dad developed a dislike of me and would meet us at the door every night I delivered his offspring to her home. Needless to say, this hindered my manly goodnight kiss and left me frustrated, causing me to stop by Melody Mitchel's apartment on my way home from my dates with Marla. Melody was a Muleshoe, Texas girl who was unwise in the ways of flashy radio newsmen. She was also a hopeful singer (who sounded like a suffering Collie dog) who was most ambitious to break into radio. I took advantage of her hopes by informing her that she had a voice and style very similar to Jo Stafford and Peggy Lee. I was crazy about Marla but could not refuse the invitations of Melody. Melody would fry eggs for me and sing "Mockingbird Hill" (complete with tra-la-las) as I crunched on her burned toast. Our shady romance lasted several months until she was forced to return to Muleshoe because of dwindling funds. I missed old Melody. I received letters of love from her for several months after she had returned to Muleshoe. I would write her letters of desire for her. I took great pains with every written word, realizing I was arousing her feminine desires.

One day, as I had gone to the studio to check my mail, I was told by the secretary that a giant man was waiting to see me. He towered over me like a huge tree and, in typical army language, informed me that if Melody received any more letters or telephone calls from me he would have the pleasure of dislocating my head from my body. It seemed that Melody had failed to inform me that she had a husband serving in the army in Korea. His term of duty with the armed forces had ended. So had my out-of-bounds romance with Melody. I still think of her whenever I hear "Mockingbird Hill"

or eat eggs and olives.

Marla and I were inseparable. We wore matching sweaters, went dancing regularly at the Avalon, smooched between munches on hamburgers at Bill's Drive Inn and held hands during the movies at the Paramount. I would still sneak her into the radio station when I was certain Jake was either in bed, out of town, or with Vampira, his private secretary.

Amarillo is noted, among other things, for its snowfall. As I mentioned, Marla's dad had no particular affection for me and I was beginning to bring her home later each night that I took her out. His patience was beginning to wear a little thin with me. One cold winter night I took Marla to the Paramount theater and we decided to go for a drive after the movie. I was anxiously awaiting reaching my favorite parking spot near Buffalo Lake. Marla was dressed radiantly and seemed to idolize me a little more than usual as I parked my Buick near the lake and began whispering sweet nothings (and I do mean nothings) in her shell pink ears.

We were doing our share of necking and listening to Paul Kallinger on XERF Del Rio, Texas and hoping he would play "They'll Never Take Her Love Away From Me" by Hank Williams, which had become our favorite song. We were paying little attention to the elements outside, since we were carried away with each other and the heater in my Buick was more than comfortable. Wrapped in each other's arms, we both dozed off to sleep while whispering "Love You's." I awoke, looked at the clock and noticed it was past three o'clock in the morning. I also noticed that it was snowing and that the panhandle ground was puffy white. I envisioned Marla's dad with a shotgun at my head and awoke the delightful dream from her slumber to inform her that we had better hit it back toward Amarillo. She informed me that she was in no hurry until I gave her the Bulova Watch Time. I turned on the ignition roared up the mighty Buick engine, snapped the gear into "drive" and attempted to pull out of our hideaway only to discover that we were hopelessly stuck in the white stuff. The more determined I was to pull out, the deeper the Buick sank into the snow. I killed the engine in fear and disgust. Marla began sobbing and I began praying for my life as the clock ticked around to near five o'clock. There was not a single car or truck on the nearby highway and I flipped to KLYN on my radio

to hear them announce that all roads into Amarillo were closed because of the massive snow.

Finally, about seven o'clock, a Texas Highway Patrol car pulled up beside us. He asked me my name and, after I informed him that I was Bill Mack, he asked my girl friend her name. After getting the information, he returned to his car and began utilizing his radio. He sat calmly in his patrol car, glancing at us from time to time. I began to sweat. About forty-five minutes later a second patrol car pulled up behind the first, and I noticed two passengers in the car. One was a patrolman, and the second disgruntled face belonged to Marla's dad!! He pushed the door open and galloped toward my car.

"What in Hell is going on here?" he roared!

"We're stuck," I replied.

"What'n Hell do you mean 'stuck'?" he further inquired

"My car is stuck!"

The trembling one walked to Marla's door, yanked it open and ordered her to get into the patrol car.

"Glamor Boy," he said, "I ought to wring your neck!"

"Daddy!" screamed Marla. "Don't touch him! I love him!"

I was beginning to chicken out of my love affair as the two patrolmen walked over to calm the screaming father and offer to help me get my car out of the bog. One of the officers asked me to start the engine and, as they walked around the car surveying the situation, I automatically shoved the gear into low and, much to the surprise of everyone, the car easily pulled onto the highway. I smiled sheepishly at the astonished father and slowly slid toward Amarillo. I noticed Marla's dad was stomping the ground and throwing snowballs at me as the two patrolmen tried to pacify him. Marla was screaming, "Come Back, Bill! Come back!" as I skidded toward the city. It was the last time I was to ever see her. I understand her parents sent her to a University up North in January.

As I mentioned, being news director didn't appeal to me. My heart just wasn't in the eyes and ears of the world. Instead of being a poor man's Edward R. Murrow, I envisioned the glory of performing a record show on KLYN. But Jake met my pleas with emphatic "NO'S". I offered to take a cut in salary, and his answer was still "no!"

I was relieved of the job of news director quite by accident one

Saturday afternoon when the Faulder twins, a couple of burly robbers, broke out of the Potter County jail, held up our KLYN transmitter, stole the engineer's car for their get-away, and KBIC (our NBC opponent) scooped us on our own robbery!

I was on the telephone talking with my new girl, Darlene, when Jake came running into my office.

"My God! We've been robbed!" he screamed.

"How's that?" I inquired.

"Our transmitter! Haven't you heard? Our transmitter was just robbed awhile ago by the Faulder twins! KGNC, damn-it-to-hell, just put out a bulletin! They scooped us! Our own transmitter was held up and KGNC beat us to the air! HELL!"

"I'll be with you in a minute, Jake." I said as I returned to my conversation with my newly found dream on the telephone.

Right in the middle of a tremendous amount of come-ons I was feeding to Darlene, I noticed the look of a demon on Jake's face as he jerked the telephone from my hand and, as I ducked under the desk for protection, heard him slam down the receiver. He took a deep breath and said, "Come out from under the desk, sex symbol!"

"Are you gonna hit me?" I asked

"I don't think so." he replied

"Are you gonna fire me?" I inquired

"I think so," he said with total disgust.



One of my first pics. in Radio with HARRY JAMES (KLYN - Amarillo)

CHAPTER SIX

Thanks to the forgivingness and understanding of Jake Brown, and the fact that I knew some shady secrets pertaining to the carrying on between him and Vampira, I retained my employment with KLYN, and much to the disgruntlement of the program director, was given a late night popular music record show, which I titled "INSOMNIA". Once again I was on top of the world and doing what I wanted to do in radio. I was really surprised with the way "INSOMNIA" caught on with the late listeners. Immediately, I began receiving donuts and coffee, cookies and cakes and gifts of all kinds through the mail. There were also a few hints of payola from some of the record distributors.

Since I was beginning to enjoy country music over pop music (which was the station's choice in formating), I began sneaking Hank Williams, Red Foley, Eddy Arnold, Lefty Frizell and the like in with my Mills Brothers, Edie Gorme, Jo Stafford, Frankie Laine, etc. Since I was on after midnight, and realizing that Jake was either moonlighting with Vampira or home asleep, and that the program director, if not asleep, was either doing the family wash, house-cleaning or receiving his nightly nagging from his wife, I gave little thought and had very little fear pertaining to the country music I was sneaking in on the show. Besides, people were eating it up and, knowing Jake, I knew he would eventually go along with me. I had noticed that when he invited me out for beers with him he would drop a few coins on Ernest Tubb and Cowboy Copus in the juke box. However, with the program director it was another matter.

The program director, whom we shall call Bruce, swished into the control room late one night after hearing me play a record by Hank Williams.

"What, may I ask, do you think you are doing?" he asked with panting breath.

"Playing records," I replied.

"What, may I inquire, was that atrocious thing you played by Hank Willard?"

"I think you mean Hank Williams," I said, being in no mood for Wonder Boy's mouth.

"Hank Williams, Hank Willard, whoever the hell the hick is - I

don't want to hear of you playing another record of that kind UNLESS I give you my permission - in writing! Do you understand, darlin'?"

I told him, with restrained words, that I understood.

"Angel," he slobbered, "You MUST do everything the way I say or suffer for it. I can, you must understand, make your job very tough for you if I so choose and it's only through the goodness of my heart and my deep down affection for you (I noticed his eyes were glassy) that I don't fire you for playing hick music. Oh, God! How horrible!" He hesitated a moment and continued, "Be a sweetheart, sweetheart."

It has always been a natural act for me to rebel, to some extent, when I am whipped with a meaningless tongue. I realized that I had been going against the station's policy, to a degree, by playing the country records and I could understand Skippy's putting me down for my deed. But, after addressing me for over a half hour on the subject of my stupidity, and since I was trying to do an air show at the same time, I began to have visions of the program director lying under the wheels of some runaway truck or some similar pleasantry.

After reminding me for the hundredth time that my job was in jeopardy, the glamorous one waltzed out of the radio station, wallowing in the power of his sword-like tongue, and joined his wife who was behind the wheel of the family car. She had driven him to the station, since she didn't trust tart-tongue at the wheel "when he was angry." It dawned on me that the only thing she allowed him to take control of was the washing machine, the baby (when it needed changing) and the vacuum cleaner. I also noticed that she was much more masculine than he and had evidence of using Nair Hair Remover on her upper lip.

When I was certain that the couple had ample time to be well on their way toward home and listening to my show while he bragged to her about chewing my fanny out, I decided to play them a record "which I was sure they would enjoy."

"To my program director and his lovely spouse, I proudly play this song." Ernest Tubb sang RAINBOW AT MIDNIGHT!

In a matter of minutes THE GIFTED ONE returned with fire in his eyes and his wife at his heels.

She screamed at me first; "YOU HAVE HUMILIATED ME!" I'LL BE THE LAUGH OF THE COUNTRY CLUB! How COULD you play that - that awful thing and dedicate it to ME of ALL PEOPLE?"

The program director dashed from behind his wife's skirt and yelled; "You'll NEVER learn, will you? You're just a hopeless small town idiot who can't learn! That's all! I'm afraid I'm going to have to send you back to Shamrock, or wherever your hicktown is, for more lessons! You really are a hopeless case, darling! I'm going to have to talk to Jake about you!"

He had hardly finished mentioning his name when Jake came into the control room. I was certain it was curtains for me. Instead, I was in for the biggest surprise I had encountered during my brief career. Jake said, "My wife and I have been listening to your show tonight with some friends. I dig it. I mean I go for the country records! It's sort of - well, it's refreshing." He looked at the program director and his astonished wife and continued, "I heard him play you RAINBOW AT MIDNIGHT awhile ago. Love that song! Don't you? I sure do".

The pale p.d. and his bitter half nodded their heads as she spoke with forked tongue, "It was beautiful, and we came by to thank him for his thoughtfulness".

The manager slapped the program director on the back, wished me goodnight and said, "Starting Monday we're giving you a country show from five-thirty in the morning until nine. Do you think you can get your tail up and down here on time?"

I assured him I could.

He then said the most beautiful words I had heard; "Drag out those Roy Acoff records you stole at the Shamrock station and let's give it a whirl".

Jake walked out of the room, the program director and his wife were pathetically silent, and I was in love with the world.

I looked at the couple and said, to my own amazement, "I'll buy the eggs if you'll wait till I get off the air."

Without saying a word, they stalked out of the room.

Early morning disc jockeys, similar to the all-night d.j.'s, have a tendency to become squirrely. Experts claim that, after working under the moon for a period of time, gravity affects the mind, causing the pre-sun disc jockey to perform wierd things.

If you are ever up and around when one of these citizens of the air waves is doing his thing you will notice that a combination of coffee nerves, phone calls from spooky people (mostly women whose husbands are working, have left them, or are passed out with booze) and "moonlight fatigue" have taken their toll. The early morning d.j. is more free speaking than his comrades due to the fact that, deep down, he could care less whether or not he loses his job. With this free-wheeling attitude, this type disc jockey usually commands top ratings during his show.

My early morning country show appeared to be a winner from the start. Sponsors began wining and dining me, trying to tie me down on an exclusive use basis. I drank their wine but refused their offers pertaining to exclusiveness. This, as any psychiatrist will tell you, only raises their opinion of you and causes them to go a little stronger toward winning you.

As I have mentioned several times, my admiration of Hank Williams was on the brink of fanaticism. I found in his voice the true soul of country music and to the listeners of my own country show on KLYN I am sure that it was obvious that I showed partiality to the singer from Alabama. I had my glorious chance to meet my idol when I was informed that he, along with a Grand Ol' Opry show from Nashville, had been booked for a week's run at the Tri-State Fair in Amarillo. KLYN was to broadcast some of its programs from the fairgrounds.

By this time, my show had been on the air for about seven months and I had acquired a fair following within the limits of the KLYN broadcasting area. I had also acquired a tremendous amount of self-esteem. I wore tailored western suits and handmade custom western boots, thanks to a trade-out with one of Amarillo's leading western wear stores. I had also struck up a friendship with a few of the country recording artists, since the Clover Club was one of Texas' leading night spots catering to the country music crowd and frequently booked the big recording names. I would persuade the artists to visit my show, having absolutely no regard for the fact that it meant their arising around five o'clock in the morning after working at the club until at least one o'clock the preceding night. Since I had the leading (and only) country music show in Amarillo and since I also hinted to the artists that their records might be in

jeopardy of being forgotten items on my program if they didn't drop by for an interview, practically all of the stars who played the city would also make it a point to visit my morning thing and yawn through a chit-chat session.

KLYN had a new manager by this time. Jake Brown had moved on to bigger and better things and the new manager, Ron Litteral was a dyed-in-the-wool country music fan. Because of this fact, the program director, seeing the writing of doom on the wall because of not being able to sweet-talk Ron, resigned.

It was great fun working for Ron. As a matter of fact, it was too much fun. Ron had no barriers up against my bringing girls into the station. He had a unique way of calming an announcer seeking a raise in pay. Instead of giving the employee a sob story, Ron would pull a fifth of Old Crow from the desk drawer, snap the cork from it and after having a few drinks with you would persuade you that he was your best friend, you were lucky to be working for him and that money was an evil between comrades.

I would accompany Ron to the various drinking spots throughout the city and, although I was only 19 and underage, had no trouble in getting served any kind of hooch I preferred. Although I wasn't a heavy drinker (I honestly didn't enjoy it and suffered from my conscience since my parents had always discouraged me from alcohol and it was forbidden in my home), I began to falsely believe that booze added to my charming character. Ron would even allow me to nip a little while on the air, although it was forbidden the other jockeys. I never drank enough to get high, but never refused a drink with my boss for fear he would think I was soft.

It was early Monday morning and the beginning day of Tri-State fair, and I was sure that my idol, Hank Williams, had had plenty of time to check into the Herring Hotel. I had made it a point to find out that the Opry troupe had made reservations at the Herring. I telephoned the hotel to make arrangements for Hank to visit my show that morning. In order to give him time to dress, I called the hotel at 4:30 a.m. and asked the desk clerk to ring Hank's room.

"I'm sorry," replied the clerk, "Mr. Williams has left orders not to be disturbed before noon, since they only arrived about two o'clock."

I quickly informed the desk clerk that Hank would want to talk

to me since I was an important part of promoting his profession. Hesitantly, the clerk rang Hank's room and after what seemed over a dozen buzzes, Hank answered.

The voice of my idol was unfriendly.

"Hank," I said, "This is Bill Mack." Not seemingly impressed with this bit of news, he replied; "That's your problem."

"I don't think you understand," I continued, "I'm the country disc jockey on KLYN."

Even this earth-tremoring announcement failed to move the singer and he yawned; "Tuff Stuff."

"I want you on my show. I want to interview you," I said.

There was a noticeable pause before he asked, in a somewhat bored tone, "What time is yo' show?"

Thinking I had detected a spark of interest, I said, "Five thirty."

"Do you mean five-thirty a.m. or five-thirty p.m.?" inquired the baladier.

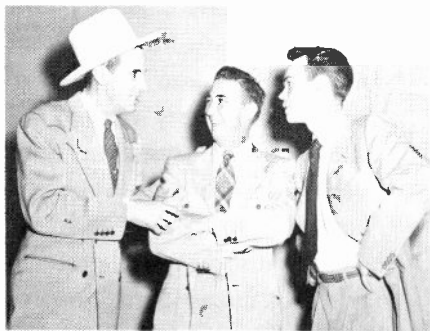
"Five-thirty this morning!"

After what seemed an eternity of waiting, Hank firmly asked; "Boy - have you lost yo' Goddamned stupid MIND?"

The click of his receiver could be heard throughout the streets of Amarillo. My castles had crumbled, I was crushed to think that my idol had no mercy on me. I was tempted to destroy all of his MGM records, but couldn't quite force myself to do it. I was hooked on Hank. I didn't realize it at the time, but Hank Williams had given me my first important lesson as a broadcaster. I wasn't adored by the masses. I was adored only by me.



My first days in radio "INSOMNIA" show on KLYN, note pretty secretary!



Earlier photo with friends ERNEST TUBB & d.j. NAT FLEMING in Wichita Falls, Texas.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Practically every disc jockey I have ever known has had a "telephone darlin." That is, he has become infatuated by a voice on the telephone that calls him frequently. The voice is always sexy, leaving much to the imagination of the d.j. Invariably, the voice is attached, through the wild imagination of the disc jockey, to a gorgeous face and figure. The girl who called me every morning was named Nancy and she had the most soothing and sexy voice I had ever heard. She resembled (in my mind) Dorothy Malone.

Nancy worked the switchboard at the hospital and called me just before seven every morning. She built my ego completely out of proportion by telling me how great I was and hinted that she would love to go out with me. However, when I pressed the issue of going out she would always have an excuse, usually telling me that she had a date with a handsome football player or some actor who was passing through town and had a gigantic crush on her. Dating her seemed a hopeless case for me, but the more she said "no" the more determined I became. Each morning she became more beautiful, by telephone, and I became more frustrated. Finally, after weeks of begging, Nancy consented to go out with me. She had changed her hours to the five to midnight shift and informed me that I could pick her up at the emergency entrance of the hospital at 12:30 a.m. I could hardly wait! Imagine! The thought of dating Dorothy Malone's double!

I described my car, the Buick convertible, to Nancy and she informed me that she would be wearing a green coat. She also informed me that she was a redhead. This fascinated me since I had never been serious with a redhead. This also sent several thoughts racing through my mind! Could I hold her? Was I a fool to think I could impress such a beauty? Or should I remain within my own meager circle of girls? Should she accept me would she remain faithful? Would a movie company snatch her up as a replacement for Dorothy Malone, should the star become impossible to handle?

I was willing to risk everything for this beauty!

I shaved and showered, put on my fanciest western suit and boots, soaked myself in Avon cologne, gulped a mouthful of sin-sin breath freshener, doused the Wildroot on my hair, and nervously

drove toward the hospital in my Buick.

"How lucky can a man be?" I asked myself.

It was misting cold rain as I entered the drive to the emergency entrance of the hospital. I splashed some more Avon Cologne on my face for good measure. My heart was pulsating and my hands were wet with sweat as I anxiously awaited THE MOMENT. I could hardly keep my foot on the accelerator because I was shaking so badly as I approached the rendezvous.

As I drove near a parked ambulance near the emergency entrance I became aware that Nancy hadn't shown up. She was probably helping some handsome doctor perform brain surgery. As a matter of fact, the emergency entrance was completely deserted - except for one huge girl standing on an elevated platform near the rear door. The poor soul was probably waiting for her family to pick her up and haul her home. I was certain she had been in the hospital for diet treatment and it hadn't worked.

As I drove nearer to her I noticed that she had begun waving! I also noticed that she was redheaded! She was wearing a GREEN COAT! She began waving AT ME!!

COULD IT BE!!!

I jammed the accelerator to the floorboard, turned my head in the opposite direction and whizzed by the waiting monument!

"Hey, Bill!" she screamed! "It's me! Nancy!"

I pretended not to hear her as I raced out the emergency exit to the refrain of "Bill, darlin'! Here I am!"

The vision of Dorothy Malone had vanished in the cold Amarillo air and, since we worked opposite shifts, I was never to hear from Nancy again.

As I had become more involved in country music, KLYN assigned me the announcing chores on a daily live radio show featuring Leon Rusk, King recording star and song writer of some merit.

Leon and I became quite close and he taught me to chord the guitar while I pushed his records on my morning show. His PETAL FROM A FADED ROSE, which he had composed with Merle Travis, was a favorite of mine. After a few weeks, Leon was letting me sing on his show.

On the Saturday before Mother's Day, Leon, his guitar man and girl friend, had asked me to accompany them to a dance they were

booked to play near Lubbock. Leon had promised to let me sing a few songs and assured me he would pay me if they made any loot since they were working the job on strictly a percentage basis. I was overjoyed! I didn't care about the money - I just wanted to perform. I had become a hopeless ham!

We loaded Leon's big car with guitars, public address system, souvenir pictures, and clean shirts and pants. We had met at the radio station and, after filling the car with the necessary items, we headed the car for the Caprock of Texas. All of us were laughing and singing as Leon put the car in reverse and we were backing out of the station drive. Suddenly, the station bookkeeper, who happened to be doing some Saturday work, yelled at me to come back. Just as we were heading down seventh street. My mother was on the telephone, he informed me. I was put out.

Since the next day was Mother's Day, Mom pleaded for me to come home. I told her I HAD to go with Leon to play the dance and she began begging me to come home. I was persistent. I told Mom I would be home next week, and she told me that Mother's day just wouldn't be complete - or happy - without me.

Leon came into the lobby where I was talking to my mother on the phone to see what was delaying me. I told him about the situation, informed him THAT I was going with him as planned, and tried to get my mom off the telephone in order that we could "head out". Leon asked to speak to her.

After a lengthy conversation with mom, Leon replaced the telephone receiver and said; "You're going home! Tomorrow is Mother's Day and you're going home, By God!"

I pleaded with Leon to let me go with him and he kept on informing me that I was going to be with my mother on Mother's Day. I kept begging Leon and finally, with his mind made up that I would honor my little mom, he turned his back on me and called me an "ungrateful little punk!"

"You ain't goin' with us and you might as well make your mind up to that fact," he said. "If you don't go home and see your mama, you ain't never goin' with us. We're playin' a big job next week and, if you will go home this weekend, I'll take you with us and guarantee you some money." He patted me on the head and continued; "Now get your ass home! I mean it!"

I drove to Shamrock and instead of going to my house, I picked up my girl friend and took her for a drive in the country, telling her how unfair my mother was and how I was going to stay away from my folks for the entire weekend because of mom's selfishness.

I changed clothes at my girl's house and we drove to Alanreed, Texas to a dance that night featuring Emmett Allen and his band. I was determined to drink all the hooch I could that night and stay away from my mother. I detested Mother's Day and all it stood for.

I spent the night on my girl friend's couch and, still evading my mom, took her to the Texas theater Sunday afternoon. I was determined to make my mother hurt deeply for her selfish ways.

After the movie, my girlfriend and I went to Fry Drug for malts and Jill Fry asked me if I had heard about the band that had been killed in Amarillo.

"What kind of band?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Jill. I just heard that a band had been killed this morning."

Not shaken by the news, and presuming it was either a rumor or, at most, some honky-tonk brawl that resulted in some musician's death, I continued to gulp down my malt. After a few minutes Aaron Fry came over to our booth and asked me if I had heard about the "hillbilly" musicians getting killed. Becoming concerned, I decided to call my boss, Ron Litteral.

Ron answered the telephone and, hearing my voice said; "Thank God!"

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard about Leon?"

"You mean Leon Rusk?"

Ron's voice was choked as he said; "Leon, his girl and his guitar man smashed head-on into another car early this morning. The girl was driving and they think she went to sleep behind the wheel."

"Who was killed?" I asked. "I heard somebody was killed!"

Ron said, in a tone I'll never forget, "They're all dead. The car was demolished. They're all dead." He paused; "Better come back up here when you can and help me track down the relatives for the funeral arrangements."

I said a prayer and went home to MOM.



The late JACK ANGLIN,
ME, JOHNNY WRIGHT,
Famous JOHNNY & JACK

My Big Six Jamboree T.V.
Show in Wichita Falls.



300 lb. pie - KLYN
Amarillo



The late LEON RUSK on far
right. Had mama not begged
me to come home for
Mothers Day I might have
died with him.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Sponsors, in their own peculiar way can be, and most generally are, the biggest pain in the backside that a broadcaster encounters during his span of the nerve damaging profession. If a sponsor spends \$10,000 a year with a radio station, it usually takes \$11,000 per year to keep him happy. This money is ordinarily spent on his behalf by purchasing booze, trips to Hawaii, broads (and hideaway apartments to house them), dinners several times a month and cocktail parties several times a year to celebrate such honored events as his anniversary, his divorce, his daughter's engagement, his daughter's pregnancy, his daughter's marriage, (usually in that order) or his dismissal from the hospital after a hemorrhoidectomy. The sponsor is happiest when he is treated like a king and the true phoniness of the radio/TV sales-man is most obvious when he is around this strange breed.

The radio salesman will usually cuss the sponsor utilizing his most colorful vocabulary. This only happens, of course, when the salesman is certain the sponsor is not around or will not catch wind of the fact that the salesman has performed such a dastardly deed. When the salesman is in the presence of the sponsor it is a complete reversal, with the salesman becoming the epitome of graciousness. He usually crawls (on all fours if necessary) into the king's masterly abode wherein he then kisses the sponsor's feet, polishes his shoes and, in severe (but common) cases, kisses the sponsor's fat wife and splashes out the mincy words describing how beautiful she is and how lucky the sponsor is to have her. This act is always good for a sizeable order.

Sponsor's feelings are easily hurt. You must cater to their every wish and also cater to their establishment or product. For instance, if it is an automobile sponsor, you must buy a car from him every year (whether the station needs one or not). Being of cold blood, the station seldom gives the station or its employees a cut-rate price. He may even hike it a few bucks over the normal price in order to satisfy an almost barbaric hatred he holds toward the salesman.

It is wise NEVER to invite a sponsor to the annual Christmas party if the station has any respect for its female employees (which it seldom does). It is at these ridiculous affairs that the sponsor, when

he has belted a few Scotches, reveals his true, fun-loving self. To invite the sponsor's wife means immediate cancellation of his commercial order.

The Adored One will put a lampshade on his head and give his impersonation of Mae West while dancing on some hapless salesman's desk (and oftentimes his fingers) and spilling ink, eggnog, and his hidden secrets in the art of lovemaking. He will most likely bite the female bookkeeper on the ear (this being the only time she has had anyone perform this delightful deed since the last Christmas party) and tell smutty jokes while the freshly scrubbed and pink salesmen bend over in false laughter. He will dance the rhumba with the salesman's wife (she has been ordered by her loving husband to adhere to the buyer's wishes or stay home) while the band plays a waltz.

He has been known to throw up on the manager's new carpet.

He will insult the party band by insisting on playing the piano, beating the drums (sometimes attempting to play both at the same time) and bellow nauseating sounds into the microphone. To him he sounds exactly like Dean Martin.

Should the sponsor boast false teeth, chances are very good that the entire station staff will soon be searching for them, while he is passed out on the couch with his fat hand on the receptionist's knee, before the party is adjourned.

The sponsor will demand, with the threat of cancellation of the order, that one of the office females be his chum after the party is over. In severe cases, he will demand the salesman's wife. In severe cases, the salesman will consent, much to the horror of his wife ("It's all for the good of the company, darling, and could mean a mink for you!")

The sponsor has the annoying habit of trying to program the station when he buys time on it. This may include demanding that his fat wife sing INDIAN LOVE CALL (which always sounds like a cat screeching in the lingering pains of death) or his fat daughter reciting the poem DADDY'S GIRL while she picks her nose. He may even present a tape recording of his family singing SILENT NIGHT and demand that the station play it even though it is mid-July.

The sponsor, like the station manager and music director, is tone deaf.

This demanding species of humanity seldom pays his bill when

it is due at the station - if he EVER pays it.

He will likely call the station after he has sobered up from the Christmas party and cancel his advertising on the grounds that he doesn't respect "drunken brawls and wild women."

I could write a full chapter on this billious individual. I just did.



With BILLY GRAY and ROY CLARK



With my Fan Club President - BOBBYE BRATCHER

CHAPTER NINE

Ever since I was a kid in grade school I had been a devoted fan of KWFT in Wichita Falls, Texas. The station though only 5,000 watts in power, had a 620 non-directional frequency on the dial and rumor had it that, because of certain minerals under the transmitting towers, the station had the equivalent outlet of a 50,000 watt outlet. I had dreamed of working for KWFT since it was noted for broadcasting several "live" shows featuring outstanding country music acts in addition to an abundance of country record shows.

My dream came true one day when I received a call from Blaine Cornwell, the station program director, informing me that they had been listening to my works on KLYN and wanted me for the radio M.C. of the HADACOL WESTERN BARN DANCE program which was presented daily on the Western network. When he asked me to fly to Wichita Falls to discuss the deal, I was overwhelmed!

It took very little persuasion and even less money to sell me on the idea of moving from Amarillo to Wichita Falls.

My change as an announcer/disc jockey on KWFT proved to be the wisest decision I had made in radio and was the beginning of a long and happy association with the first real professionals I had worked with in broadcasting. It seemed that everything was organized to perfection. Blaine Cornwell was one program director who actually had the best voice and knew more about broadcasting than any of the announcers who worked under his guidance. We all looked up to Blaine.

In addition to emceeing the barn dance show each day at noon on the network, I was given a five o'clock a.m. country record show and, at 6:30 a.m. was assigned the announcing chores for a live thirty minute broadcast featuring the Stamps Ozark Quartet. The Stamps program preceded a fifteen minute show featuring Lillie Mae at the organ. Lillie was a very charming lady of the very highest moral standards and her program, except on rare occasions, was tape recorded. She had a tremendous listening audience and was in great demand for personal appearances at such functions as weddings, funerals, church functions, etc. I admired her very much although, as I mentioned, her shows were practically always recorded and I seldom saw her.

The Stamps Ozark Quartet was a typical gospel singing group. They loved to sing gospel songs, they loved to make money (which they did since they, too, were in constant demand for personal appearances) and they delighted in breaking me up when I was doing one of their commercials for a chicken feed company. They would pull such "funnies" as setting my copy on fire as I was trying to read it, picking their noses while I was praising the outstanding quality of the chicken feed and various other little tricks. They became frustrated because they couldn't break me up. I had become immune to such dirties while working with the late Leon Rusk, in Amarillo.

One morning, in desperation, they decided to pull the lowest of all possible tricks in what they thought would be a sure-fire way to break me up during the commercial. Fred Bennett, the bass singer, was one of the funniest looking characters I had ever met and was blessed with an outstanding bass voice. He was scheduled to sing a bass solo, JUST A ROSE WILL DO, immediately preceding my second commercial for the chicken feed. With Fred's consent, the three other members of the quartet decided they would remove his clothing, leaving the impact of removing his baggy undershorts just as I was to begin the commercial. With pinpoint timing they removed Fred's shirt, pants, undershirt and just as I began my commercial, on the verge of hysteria, they removed his undershorts. At that precise moment I heard the most ear-shattering scream I had ever heard (right in the first couple of sentences of my chicken-feed delivery) and I became speechless with fright! It seems that Lillie Mae had decided to do her organ program live that particular morning and had walked unexpectedly into the studio to prepare for her fifteen minutes and, without the benefit of her morning coffee, had been greeted by the gospel bass singer in the all-together! Fred tried to hide under the piano while the remaining members tried to revive Lillie Mae, who had fainted, and I attempted to ad-lib the program out of the horrible situation. My ad-lib attempts were in vain and I had to turn the program back to the control room for them to fill the balance of the time with records while Fred zipped up his pants and Lillie Mae, who had come back to life, ran out of the studio in tears and refused to do her program. I never saw her in the studio again.

"Singin' Cactus Jack" was one of the few remaining "balladiers"

and did a live show with his guitar every morning at 5:15 on KWFT. No one ever really knew Cactus since he only inhabited the studio during rehearsals and broadcast time every morning. He never attended the Christmas parties or station get-togethers. He would arrive at the station about five o'clock every morning, take his Martin guitar out of its case, rehearse a few songs, and seldom speak to the announcer on duty.

Cactus struck everyone as a very serious person since most of his songs were either hymns or sad bits about mother, ("Mother's not Dead, She's Only A' Sleepin'", "Sweeter Than The Flowers", "They Just Buried Mama Today", "I Just Told Mama Goodbye," etc. etc)

The announcer on Cactus Jack's show was Don Brown, the station owner's brother. Don had a wierd and somewhat warped sense of humor and at the same time detested Cactus Jack, feeling that his brother was punishing him for some deed he had performed during his early life by making him begin the day with the chore of announcing the "Singin' Cactus Jack Show". At the same time, Cactus Jack made it equally obvious that he couldn't stand Don. The two never spoke to each other and would sneer violently when they were forced to meet in the morning.

This early morning killowatt feud came to a head unexpectedly early one morning when the transmitter called Don, in the middle of Cactus Jack's program, and informed him that the station was off the air and would be off for at least 15 minutes while they changed a tube. Cactus Jack was unaware of this fact and kept on singing his sad song, thinking he was bringing the masses to tears. Don didn't inform Cactus of the difficulties of KWFT and was getting his kicks watching Cactus sing to the acoustical walls.

Suddenly, with fiendish delight, Don decided to pull what I think is one of the most evil tricks ever heard of. He decided to fake a "fit" while the balladier was in the midst of one of his saddest songs. Don entered the stuido as Cactus was singing MAMA IS GONE, and fell to the floor making maddening noises. Cactus, in order to drown out the noise, began singing louder. He was shaking in his Tony Lamas. Don grabbed the microphone and began screaming obscenities while Cactus tried in vain to pry the mike away from him. Don began foaming at the mouth and crawling about the studio floor snapping at Cactus' legs similar to a mad dog. Cactus, in

desperation, began screaming to his audience! "Send help!, Somebody PLEASE send help!"

Either Cactus Jack's audience was smaller than anticipated or no one took him seriously, because there was no reaction to his pleas.

Don, deciding that he had gone far enough, tolder up in convulsive laughter while pointing at old Cactus. Cactus, in the meantime, had suffered a major nervous breakdown and was in no mood for practical jokes. With the eyes of a demon, Cactus Jack grabbed the Martin guitar by the neck and, with the swing of Arnold Palmer, smashed the body of the guitar into the face of Don Brown, leaving both the instrument and Don's nose in complete ruin. Without a word, the Mother-singer left the studios never to return. When Ken Brown, the station owner, found out about the practical joke his younger brother had pulled, he sent Don back home to mama.

The last news I heard of the morning Balladier, Cactus Jack, was that he had been taking shock treatments at a hospital in Ohio.

Blaine Cornwell and Kenyon Brown decided that I could handle my own early morning disk show on KWFT and gave me the unearthly hours of 5:00 a.m. until 7:00 a.m. to display my wares. I found this most enjoyable in many respects due to the fact that the feminine early risers would call me (after their spouses had left for work) and build my ego. However, it was also a chore to arise at 4:00 a.m. since I had taken a bride from Oklahoma.

I would blast off with what I considered cordial greetings and wise cracks, usually pinpointing my show toward the elevator operator in the Kemp Hotel (a beautiful blue eyed female) who telephoned me every morning at 5:00 o'clock and whispered sexie sounds of praise on me and my show. The fact that I was a married man escaped my memory during these delightful and drooling moments. I dedicated Lefty Frizzell's, I LOVE YOU A THOUSAND WAYS to "Dawn" (our secret name) every morning. Although I had no intention of betraying my wedding vows, I received a charge out of making a 5,000 watt love affair with the luscious one. Only after my new wife began asking me about "Dawn" did I cease playing the Frizzell tune. I also suggested to the operator that we change her secret name to "Lillian". My wife also caught on to this bit of

underhanded mish mash and, in order to avoid a crisis on the home front, I decided to halt my amorous carryings on.

I had begun to perform more as a singer on KWFT and was given a 5:30 a.m. live show with my band. I had picked up a group of four musicians around Wichita Falls who had failed their auditions with the more important musical groups and called my outfit The Black Mountain Boys. They worked very cheap. The unit consisted of a fiddle, a steel-guitar, bass-fiddle and guitar. I had also learned to strum a few chords on the guitar. Naturally, I was the star. We faked our way through a few weeks of broadcasts and for some unknown reason, after recalling our "different" sound, we began to receive an amazing amount of offers to perform at various school auditoriums throughout North Texas and Southern Oklahoma. Bill Mack and his Black Mountain Boys were, we were certain, on their way to the big time.

One of my sponsors on KWFT was a used car dealer whom I shall refer to, for obvious reasons, as Big Hearted Burt. In order to accommodate the comfort of my band on our travels to the various auditoriums, Burt insisted that I use one of his cars. It was a bulging 1950 Cadillac with the bold print BILL MACK AND HIS BLACK MOUNTAIN BOYS, KWFT, WICHITA FALLS, TEXAS - SPONSORED BY BIG HEARTED BURT painted on both sides. If memory serves me right, AMERICA'S NUMBER ONE MOST PROMISING COUNTRY SINGER was also painted underneath the jarring announcement (at my request).

I conned a local western clothing dealer to outfit my band in blue western suits with matching blue boots. I, being the star, wore a yellow suit and matching yellow boots. We may have played lousy, but we sure looked pretty.

Big Hearted Burt surprised me one morning by asking me to drop by his car lot where I discovered that he had purchased a huge band trailer to match the powder blue color of the Cadillac. This brought tears of happiness to my eyes. More tears of joy poured when the trailer boasted the sign: BILL MACK, AMERICA'S MOST PROMISING COUNTRY SINGER - SPONSORED BY BIG HEARTED BURT.

The first job we played with the new trailer attached to the car was in Ardmore, Oklahoma and Burt decided to go with us on the

appearance. We loaded the instruments and public address system into the trailer and Burt loaded himself with Jack Daniel and a gorgeous red head. Since Burt weighed about 300 pounds it was necessary for four of us to sit in the front seat while Burt, his red head and my skinny fiddle player occupied the back seat. Burt tried to persuade us to put the fiddle player in the front seat with us but we found it impossible since my bass-fiddle player was also a heavyweight.

As we were leaving Wichita Falls, Burt ordered the guitar player, who was driving, to stop at the liquor store near the city limits where he purchased several fifths of Jack and a few cokes.

"Boys, we're gonna have a hell of a time in Oklahoma!" He laughed as we hit the open road.

As the obvious Cadillac and matching trailer roared toward Oklahoma we noticed the occupants of the cars and trucks we passed would point and wave at us. We would proudly wave back at them while Big Hearted Burt would wave, holding a fifth of Jack Daniel in his hand. He was busy mixing whiskey and coke in the back seat for himself, his red head and the band, and passing his mixtures around the car in paper cups. Since he was my sponsor I didn't dare call a halt to his hospitality. Burt began slurping more and more of his booze, kissing the cooperative red head and passing more drinks to my band (all of whom seemed to be enjoying the proceedings) as we neared Ardmore. Since I seldom drank hooch, I was faking my drinks and pouring most of the contents of my cup out the car window when Burt was sneaking a kiss from his red head (who was beginning to show signs of tipsiness).

We arrived at the Ardmore auditorium, backed our band trailer near the stage door and proceeded to unload the dizzy passengers from the Cadillac. By this time Burt and his red head had begun singing duets with an outstanding amount of gusto. After each self-selected production Burt would slap the red head on the knee, smack her on the lips, burp and then proclaim, "You're a hell of a singer! One fine (burp) hell of a singer!"

The sponsor of the Ardmore show was the local P.T.A. and several of the ladies, dressed in their Sunday best, were waiting near the stage door to greet us. I remember their flowered hats. I also remember their astonished expressions when we began to slide our

bodies out of the car. The spokesman for the group, a tall, middle aged matron in her fifties, approached the car with her memorized greeting speech just as Big Hearted Burt was weaving out the back door with a paper cup filled with his mixture. Before the nervous spokesman could utter a word, Burt handed her his cup, slapped her on the back and laughingly growled, "Sweetheart - have a drink on ol' Big Hearted Burt! I OWN this damned band!"

The insulted soul pushed Burt's cup away from her, spilling most of the cold contents down the front of her best Sunday dress. Burt, displaying the act of a gallant gentleman, proceeded to wipe the excess fluid from the lady's dress with his hand (which resembled a ham), touching parts of her anatomy which she regarded as private property. Several other members of the P.T.A. had gathered around our little entertainment group as the spokesman began to turn red in the face and tears began to dampen her eyes.

"Just look at my new dress!" She exploded.

Burt, who was on his knees in front of the lady attempting to complete his dry cleaning job, proudly proclaimed, "Don't let that little old cheap wet dress spoil your night, honey! Big Hearted Burt will buy you a bunch out of Nieman-Marcus in Dallas!" He pointed to his tipsy red head and added, "Just like this sexie little darlin' is wearin'! Ain't that a gas? No sir! Ain't no wet dress gonna spoil this night! Let's have a hell of a time in Oklahoma!"

The other members of the P.T.A. put their arms around the wet one and proceeded to lead her away from my rowdy sponsor. I was speechless while the members of my band didn't seem particularly concerned over the matter. They opened the band trailer and began unloading their instruments and hauling them through the stage door. Burt began to supervise the unloading activities while smacking the red head and gulping a newly mixed drink. The two began to harmonize in nauseating tones to the tune IF YOU'VE GOT THE MONEY, I'VE GOT THE TIME . Their voices resembled the sounds of mating water buffalo.

Undoubtedly, our arrival reputation had preceded our curtain time. Although the Ardmore auditorium was packed the reaction to our musical numbers from the crowd was quite a bit less than had been expected. My band was also showing obvious signs that they

had been partaking of the grape when, in the middle of a gospel song I was attempting, the bass man screamed at the top of his voice, "Ah ha! Let'em have it, Billy Boy!"

I noticed, just before our intermission, that Big Hearted Burt was trying to get my attention off stage by crazily waving his arms. I pretended I didn't notice him. Then he began to call to me. "Hey, Bill!" He yelled. He was still holding the red head and a paper cup. I still ignored his actions. Suddenly, with all attempts to get my attention seemingly to have failed for him, Burt performed the most unpardonable act he could possibly have conceived of. He pulled the stage curtain in the middle of what I thought was one of my hottest numbers. The audience, relieved I am sure, thought it was intermission time. I was boiling! I had had enough of Fatso the Sponsor and had delusions of busting my Martin guitar over his head! What added to my fierce anger was when I heard the bass player say, "Hey! Let's go get a drink from ol' Burt!"

Burt weaved on stage toward me grumbling, "Hey, Billy Boy! Didn't you hear me callin' you?"

I raised my guitar to hit him and the fiddle player, the most sober member of the band, grabbed the guitar from me. I don't think Big Hearted Burt noticed my intended reaction.

"What in hell made you pull a trick like that, Burt?" I asked.

"I want you to hear something, Billy Boy!" He replied. He motioned for the red head to come on stage. "This purty little thang can sing!"

I started to walk off stage when Burt grabbed my arm.

"She's been sangin' to me back there and by gawd she can sang!"

"You just pulled a heck of a trick, Burt!" I shouted.

"No I didn't," he laughed. "I pulled the curtain!"

He slapped me on the back to emphasize his bad joke.

"What do you want, Burt?" I asked.

"I want this sweet thang to sing on this damned show!" He said.

"We haven't even rehearsed with her, Burt!"

"Hell, boy, she don't need no rehearsin'! Dammit, she's better'n Kay Starr!" Burt slurped from his cup of happiness and squeezed the red head who was also swigging from her mixture between giggles. "Put this purty little thang out there on that damned stage with you

and I'll guarantee - ol' Burt will personally guarantee (he sounded like he was trying to sell me a car) that them Okies out there will go hawg-ass wild! You need somethin' to brighten this show up, boy - and this little thang is it! Now go get it!"

Greed overcame me as it dawned on me that Burt was furnishing my newly formed band with the Cadillac and trailer. It also passed through my mind that I would hate to transfer the Black Mountain Boys and the star of the show from town to town in a 1949 Chevrolet which, at that time, was parked in my garage at home and was being utilized by my new wife to haul our laundry to the laundromat in the shopping center near our apartment.

"What do you want to sing?" I asked the lovely one.

Burt, who undoubtedly had become her agent, answered for her. "Git her to sang IT WADN'T GAWD WHO MADE HONKY TONK ANGELS and LET OL' MOTHER NATURE HAVE HER WAY and - hell! Let her sang a bunch of 'em! Liven this damned ol' show up! She's a star, boy! The two of you will make one hell of a team!"

Suddenly I realized that we had taken a twenty minute intermission and I tried to hustle the band back on stage. They were in the dressing room partaking of more of Big Hearted Burt's joy juice which he had set up for them. They were reluctant to return to their posts but I finally persuaded them that playing the second half of the show was part of show business. The bass man had passed out on the floor of the dressing room. Finally, I talked them into returning to their respective instruments and we clumsily began playing "WILDWOOD FLOWER" as the curtain was drawn - indicating that the second half of the Bill Mack Show was underway. It was somewhat discouraging to notice that less than half the audience had returned for the second half of our musical spectacular.

Before "WILDWOOD FLOWER" had ended Burt was waving his arms crazily, trying again to get my attention off stage. I began warbling my first vocal after the intermission and before my first nasal tones reached the audience I heard Burt yelling, "Hey, Billy Boy! Bring her on! The gal is ripe, man!"

Realizing that any further effort on my part to attempt any semblance of a show was in vain, I announced to the astonished audience and surprised band members that I was introducing a new

singing discovery. I noticed that the red head was standing nervously off stage and that Big Hearted Burt was giving her a big kiss in the mouth and a pat on the back side to assure her that she was "on her way to the big time" in the field of entertainment. As she wobbled onstage I heard Burt yell, "Tell them Okies out there that Big Hearted Burt owns her! Give'em hell, sweetheart!"

The audience remained deathly quiet as the innocent thing giggled to them, weaved at the microphone and informed those fortunate enough to be in attendance that she was going to begin her part of the program by singing "COLD, COLD HEART".

"What key do you sing it in?" whispered the guitar man.

"I don't know, angel," was her reply.

I urged her to start singing and assured her that we would find her key. She gave Burt, who was throwing her kisses off stage with one hand while holding a newly filled cup with the other, a wink. She then opened her mouth to begin her production. What eventually exited her tonsils was a tone never before heard by man. It was a cross between an eagle being crushed by a gorilla and the screeching of a faulty transmission on a 1946 Kaiser automobile. Before she had finished the first few lines of the song (?) the audience had broken in convulsive laughter. My band was also hysterical. This, however, didn't seem to bother the new singing discovery as she continued bellowing, in her most unique fashion, the Hank Williams classic. I looked at Burt. He formed a zero with his fingers, signaled to me and shouted, "They love th' hell out of her, boy! Ain't she a gas? Knock them Okies on their asses, sweetie! Ah ha!"

After Singin' Sally brought COLD, COLD HEART to a screeching halt the audience was deafening with laughter. It was a first in entertainment. The first time a band never found the key to a song during its entire run. Not the type to be discouraged, the red head then announced that she was going to sing "MOM AND DAD'S WALTZ". I began to break out in a cold sweat, the band began another hysterical round of laughter and the audience began leaving the auditorium. The outcast canary burped and fumbled through the tune written by Lefty Frizzell (as I remember - she even tried to sound like Lefty) while Burt was slapping the back of the man who pulled the curtains bragging on his new singing discovery. I noticed

Burt offering the man a drink which he declined (I later discovered that the curtain puller was a Baptist minister who had donated his time to pull the curtain that night. I was also informed that he was a FORMER fan of mine).

After the delightful doll completed "MOM AND DAD'S WALTZ" the few remaining occupants of the auditorium (mostly made up of burly Ardmore High football players) began to hiss, boo and toss pennies on stage (which my band hurriedly picked up and pocketed). The buxom bombout then displayed the most refreshing act she could possible perform at that time. She curtsied, tossed the audience a kiss, kissed my bass player and weaved off stage. Burt was waiting for her in the wings with his arms wide open. He embraced her, lifted her up into his arms and carried her on stage while she kicked her feet and giggled. Still holding her in his arms, her dress high enough to display her J.C. Penney girdle, Burt dumbfounded me by stepping to the microphone and announcing to the remaining few, "Ain't this gal great! I own this precious thang! I own this whole damned band! I'm Big Hearted Burt - the used car king of Wichita Falls! I just want you folks to know that we've had a hell of a time in Oklahoma! You Okies come to Wichita Falls and see me sometime and by gawd I'll make you a hell of a deal on a car!" He slapped the red head on the rump after replacing her to her feet and as she giggled, threw the exiting audience another kiss (even the football players had had enough) and wrapped her arms around Big Hearted Burt, Burt grabbed the microphone again and shouted, "That's enough show. Like ol' Hank Williams says - always leave'em wantin' more!"

After we had loaded the instruments into the trailer following the Ardmore nightmare Burt decided he would do the driving back to Wichita Falls indicating that our regular driver, the guitar man, "had been drinkin' too much" for our safety. We therefore reversed our passenger positions by seating four of us in the back seat of the Cadillac while Burt, the red head and the skinny fiddle player occupied the front seat. I informed him that I would be happy to drive, to which he replied, "Billy Boy, you're the star! You just sit back there and grab a little nap and ol' Big Hearted Burt will drive you right up to your front door! No sir! You sure as hell ain't gonna do no drivin'! You done your work for th' night! Ha! Ha! Them ol'

Okies ate that show up, didn't they?" He slapped the red head on the knee and added, "Sweetheart, you made ol' Burt mighty proud! Fiddle man - as you can see, my hands is gonna be full goin' home - Ha! Ha! You be the bartender and pass th' drinks!"

The fiddle player needed no further coaxing and began mixing the booze as Burt wrapped one arm around his delightful dish and the Cadillac hit the open road for Texas.

Burt stopped at practically every service station and truck stop between Ardmore and Wichita Falls in order for him and the red head to "rest" and get cold cokes for the mixtures being devoured by the occupants. From time to time he and the new female discovery would blend in what they considered absolute harmony on some of the big country hits of the day. By this time the bass player, who was sitting in the back seat with us, was joining in the vocals thereby forming an unwelcomed trio. A few plans were also being discussed by Burt and the girl pertaining to her future with my band! I was seldom brought into the conversation. From some of the tid bits of conversation I happened to overhear, it seems the signs on the car trailer were to be changed to read BILL MACK and his BLACK MOUNTAIN BOYS - featuring America's Most Beautiful and Most Promising Female Country Singer, SINGIN' SALLY - Sponsored by BIG HEARTED BURT. I noticed with not the least of regret that AMERICA'S NUMBER ONE MOST PROMISING COUNTRY SINGER (meaning me, of course) would have to be removed from it's position on the signs in order to present the praises of Singin' Sally. Burt, sloshing his mixed concoctions over the front of the car whenever he hit upon a million dollar brainstorm, promised Sexie Sally that he would furnish her with the most glittering western outfits, get her on the Grand Ol' Opry (it seems he once met Ernest Tubb and was a personal friend of "Little" Jimmy Dickens), get her a record contract ("Honey, they'll be knockin' down your door - any record company will - to git you on records! You'll sell a million records! Damned if you won't! Hell! I might just start my own record company! Ha! Ha! How 'bout that? Big Heart Records!"). It began to hurt a little when I overheard him whisper to her, "I may get a special band together for you. This damned band had a little trouble followin' you tonight." The most damaging content of the conversation was when he promised the little thing that he would

accompany us on all of our personal appearances from here on out to make sure things were run right!

About twenty miles out of Wichita Falls the expected occurred. Burt was speeding through a small town when a police car, red lights flashing, signaled for us to stop. Burt, an old pro at hiding hooch, tossed his bottle and paper cups, a couple of which were still half filled with Jack and coke, into the back seat soaking me and the others sitting in the back. The officer walked up to Burt's window after glaring at those of us in the back seat with his flashlight and ordered him to show his driver's license. Burt smiled sheepishly and handed him his license.

You've been speeding, mister," said the cop.

Burt, also an old pro at ad-libbing out of matters such as these, said, "I know I was puttin' on a little steam back there, officer, but I'm tryin' to git ol' Bill Mack back there home. He's a little puny. He's had a little too much to drink and I had to drive for him. Ha! Ha! Th' little son-of-a-gun wanted to drive hisself! Can you imagine that? I'm Big Hearted Burt and I own this here band! You probably hear'em on KWFT. I'll make damned sure they do you a song in th' mornin'!"

The policeman seemed unimpressed as he walked around and checked the license plate.

I could have murdered the blob for telling the officer what he did about me. However, I was silently praying that we wouldn't be taken to jail.

The cop returned to Burt's window and asked, "Have you been drinkin', mister?"

"Hell no, officer! Like I said - I'm drivin' this bunch of drunks home and puttin' 'em to bed! I hope you don't think I'd endanger the life of this little doll of mine by mixin' alcohol with my drivin'!"

"Would you please get out of the car, mister?" asked the policeman.

We were all shaking in the back seat as Burt obliged the cop and stepped out of the car. They walked back to the squad car and talked for what seemed an eternity. Then we noticed that the policeman had Burt walking a line! It was at this time that ol' Burt was a real pro at exercising mind over matter. He walked a perfectly straight line and in the early hours of the dark morning, with headlights

gleaming his way, he resembled a baby hippo. After a few more minutes of conversation outside the car Burt was given a ticket by the cop and he re-entered the Cadillac. As we cruised away from the squad car, at a somewhat slower speed, Burt slapped the red head on the leg again and laughed, "It's who you are that counts, baby! Ha! Ha! Did you see ol' Burt git out of that mess? Use your head, honey, and they cain't hang you! Yes sir, ol' Burt is the best when it comes to usin' his head! Mind you I said use your head - not lose your head! It's a damned good thang you weren't drivin', Billy Boy. We'd all be on our way to jail by now! Ol' Big Hearted Burt knows how to handle things!" He looked at the idolizing red head, kissed her on the mouth nearly having a head on collision with an on-coming car and added, "And ol' Burt's gonna handle you, darlin'" He then ordered the fiddle man to mix another round of fluid ammunition.

Big Hearted Burt kept a close pulse on the activities of the Bill Mack Show for several weeks. He even went so far as to purchase a complete wardrobe of the flashiest western dresses for Singin' Sally. He accompanied us on most of our personal appearances but when his used car business required that he remain in Wichita Falls and demanded that my show proceed without his overseeing genius we would take Singin' Sally and do our utmost to present the show without him.

It wasn't long, when Burt wasn't with us, before I discovered that there was a more than casual friendship developing between Singin' Sally and my bass man. One night during intermission I discovered them smooching in her dressing room. I knew that the situation was becoming serious when I overheard the bass man tell her, in the early hours of the morning, that he and his wife "just couldn't get along" and that she (Singin' Sally) was "growing on him". Eventually the two love birds began traveling to our shows in a separate car from the rest of us. It seemed a little low handed to me since the car they traveled in was a present to her from Big Hearted Burt. Burt, of course, was not aware of the back street affair being carried on by his red head and my bass man. The bass man's wife was also in the dark on the matter. It wasn't long before the bass man was sharing Burt's strange praises of the talents of the shapely newcomer ("This gal has sure added somethin' to this damned band!").

After approximately two months of appearances with the supporting attraction of Singin' Sally, watching the audiences steal quietly away at intermissions after her presentations, it became a necessity for me to inform Burt that his protege was ruining our already shallow shows. I drove into his used car lot one warm afternoon dreading to approach my happy-go-lucky, big-hearted friend and sponsor with the news that the flame-haired warbler would have to perform her numbers with another band. I found Burt talking with an elderly lady beside a 1949 Chevrolet and praising the merits of the shabby looking vehicle. He was dressed in his usual Hawaiian sport shirt which was drenched with sweat from a big deal sales pitch. As I remember - Burt was always sweating and even on the coldest nights wore a short sleeved sport shirt under his coat. He would immediately remove his coat after entering a building or car.

I heard Burt delivering one of his hottest sales pitches. He informed the elderly matron: "Lady, this is a gem of a car. I hate to let it go because it used to belong to my mother and it - well, it holds a special place in my heart."

I noticed the old lady gently patting Burt's arm. His face became flushed as he continued: "When mama died I put this old chevy in my garage and swore I'd never let it go but - well, times got a little tough with my wife being sick and all." He paused to dry the facsimile of a tear from his eye. "Anyhow, I decided to sell mama's car. A bunch of folks have tried to buy it off of me. As you can see - it's only got 18,000 miles on it but I just can't stand to part with it. I can still see mama drivin' to church in it." He paused a while longer, gripped the old woman's arm and said, "You make me think of mama. Swear if you don't! I hope you'll understand if I don't let you have this car. I know you got your heart set on it and all but - well - could I interest you in a flashy lookin' Studebaker that I got back here on the lot?"

"I kinda wanted a Chevrolet," replied the old soul. "One like this one here. My dear departed husband always told me to stay with General Motors products and I like Chevrolets."

Burt, utilizing his best acting talent, looked at the old lady, removed his handkerchief again and dried his eyes. He coughed, hugged the old lady and said, "Well - oh how I hate to see her go but - you promise to take care of it for me?"

"I'll treat it like one of my grandchildren," replied the fly to the spider.

"Will you bring it in from time to time for me to see it?"

"I'm usually downtown every week-end," said the touched soul. "I'll bring it by every time I'm downtown."

"You can have it," said Burt. "And just to let you know how I trust you will take care of it, I'm gonna fill it up with gas for you." He shook his head, indicating that he was in pain. "Now let's go in and write up the papers - before I change my mind."

I stood around the car lot waiting for Big Hearted Burt to draw up the lethal papers designating the ownership fo the 1949 Chevie to the anxious woman and trying to think of the proper words announcing the severance of Singin' Sally from the Bill Mack musical organization. Approximately forty five minutes rolled by and I saw Burt and the old woman step from his small office and walk toward her new purchase arm in arm. The lady was still thanking Burt for his confidence in her and Burt was still portraying the mourning son on the brink of parting with a family heirloom. The woman opened the door to the Chevrolet with the keys in her hand, slammed the door, patted Burt on the arm and attempted to start the vehicle only to hear the click of a stubborn engine. Burt stood beside the car with a flushed expression on his pudgy cheeks. The elderly lady tried the starter again with the same silent results.

"There seems to be something wrong with this car," she said softly.

Burt opened the door in order to allow the lady to exit the delapidated monster and then placed his bulky form behind the wheel where he was met with the same results from the motor. Although I couldn't hear the words Burt was exclaiming, it was obvious from the expression on the customer's face that they were not in favor of the dead car. Shortly, Big Hearted Burt removed his frame from the vehicle.

"Dammit all to hell!" He screamed.

"What's wrong with it?" Asked the lady.

"The sumbitch is dead - that's what's wrong with it! The sumbitch is dead!"

"But I thought . . ." began the innocent one.

"You know what thought did, lady?" Interrupted Burt.

"Thought . . ." he paused. "Well, thought never got you no damned place!" He looked toward the Mexican who was working his lot and shouted, "Hey, Pedro! Git some battery cables and start this sumbitch!"

The woman was upset by this time and said, "Are you sure this car will run for me?"

"Grandma, all this little mother needs is a little love, a lot of oil and a battery cable! Hey, Pedro! Git yore cotton pickin' fanny over here and start this wreck!"

The Mexican finally succeeded in starting the bad deal and the last I saw of the woman was through a screen of thick black smoke driving down Scott Street.

I could easily detect that Burt's heart wasn't so big as he approached me and asked, "Now - what can I do for you, Billy Boy?"

Before I could answer, he yelled, "That ol' lady will git just about to Iowa Park and then that damned thang will stop on her! And just watch! She'll call my joint to come and git her! Dammit to hell!"

"What's wrong with it, Burt?" I asked.

"Th' damned thang is wore out! Just like th' driver! Th' damned thang is shot!"

Jokingly, I laughed: "I thought you said that car belonged to your mother!"

"That car, Billy Boy, belonged to a hot-roddin' teen-ager who wore th' sumbitch out in one week! Th' only thang my ol' lady ever drove was my ol' man! An' she drove him crazy!" He calmed a few degrees and added, "Now, how about comin' in for a beer?"

"I need to talk with you, Burt," I said.

"Whatsa matter, Billy Boy? You got problems?"

"I sure do. My problem is Singin' Sally!"

Burt removed one of his white shoes and began scratching his athlete's foot. "Th' hell, you say!"

"She's got to go, Burt! She's ruining my show!"

Burt repeated: "Th' hell, you say!"

"I'm not kiddin' you Burt! Th' gal is awful!"

"Boy," exclaimed Burt, "that gal IS yore damned show!"

"She's gotta go, Burt. I'm sorry," I said, "but she has gotta go!"

"Give some thought to that damned statement, Billy Boy! Give some powerful thought to it!" Burt slurped from a beer that the Mexican had brought him and continued, "When little red goes - the Cadillac and trailer go!"

With this last statement from Burt my selfishness returned for a few split seconds. However, I was determined and said, "Singin' Sally is out!"

"Okey, Billy m' boy! Jus' you leave th' keys in it and th' Mexican or me will pick up your Cadillac sometime this afternoon."

Without any further argument I drove the Cadillac to my house leaving Burt with his higher than usual blood pressure and beet-red face pouting on his car lot. As he had threatened, by late afternoon the Cadillac and band trailer had been picked up by the Mexican and returned to Big Hearted Burt's Used Cars. I must admit, however, that it was worth the forfeit to relieve my show of Singin' Sally. I also missed the Cadillac and matching band trailer. Strangely, I missed most of all - Big Hearted Burt. Even during his obnoxious interference with my shows, Big Hearted Burt played an important part in my early days of broadcasting. We not only missed Big Hearted Burt, Burt also missed us. He let this fact be known via his frequent calls to my house and, utilizing his most penetrating language, inquiring if everything was all right with me and the band.

"I still got that Cadillac. Even got yore damned sign still on it! I can't sell th' thang! Who wants to ride all over th' country with BILL MACK and his BLACK MOUNTAIN BOYS painted on th' side of their car? Hell! They'd be laughed out of th' state!" He said. "Still got that damned trailer, too! I may use it for a chicken coop!" He paused a minute and then, in the only serious tone I ever heard my fat friend utter, he said, without any profanity, "I wish you'd come by and git th' stuff off my lot. You'd be doin' me a favor. Besides . . . I like ol' Billy Boy. It'll be my contribution to th' Black Mountain Boys. Come by and see me."

Burt never waited for my reply. He hung up the phone.

Pride - and the ignorance of my youth - never allowed me to return to an honest friend.

As I mentioned earlier, Burt was never seen wearing anything but a Hawaiian sport shirt, dark trousers and sloppy shoes. Early one morning, however, his wife noticed that he had showered and put on

a white shirt, dark tie and his best dark suit. She asked him why he was dressing so uncommonly classie.

"I'm gonna go see th' doc," he replied.

"Why?" she inquired.

"I had indigestion all night. Didn't sleep a wink th' whole damned night!"

She noticed that his face was extremely red. It was a little past six in the morning.

"Burt," she said, "you're as red as a beet! Let me call the doctor right now!"

"No!" He snapped. "Don't wake that money grubbin' sumbitch up at this hour or he'll charge me double! Besides, he was probably up all night deliverin' babies. I'll call him durin' his office hours."

There was no persuading the set soul and he left early for his little office at the used car lot. About eight o'clock he telephoned his wife and said, "I think I'll call that damned doctor. This indigestion is killin' me!"

"Let me call him, Burt." She pleaded

"Hell no! I'll call him! I've always wanted to wake that sumbitch up!"

"Promise me you'll call him right now, Burt."

"I promise," he replied. "Kiss th' kids for me. I love you all."

Burt's wife told me a few days later that she had never heard such sincerity in his usually robust voice. She called the baby sitter, put on her slacks and rushed to the car lot to take him to the doctor. On her arrival, shortly before eight thirty, she was greeted by the Mexican on the car lot.

"Meester Burt is seek!" He informed her.

She rushed into the office to discover Big Hearted Burt with his head resting on his arms near the telephone and a half filled bottle of Jack Daniel. She tried to awaken him only to discover that the normal flushness had left his face.

Big Hearted Burt was dead.

At the cemetery following his funeral I placed my arms around his grieving widow and hugged his two small boys and little girl. She said something that I will never forget.

"Burt was just a big over-grown child who loved his family. You were part of his family, Bill. He loved you so very, very much. He

never would sell your car and trailer. 'They belong to my friend, Billy Boy', he would say. He just loved you so very much."

From the void I felt after the passing of my neglected friend, Big Hearted Burt, it was true. Big Hearted Burt had a BIG heart.



WBAP Midnight Show in Action, BIG TILDA on phone.



DOSHIA WALL "Miss Country Music U.S.A." She works with me on shows - There's still hope for a midnite Disk Jockey!

CHAPTER TEN

KWFT in Wichita Falls during the early fifties, had a reputation of keeping several top acts on it's talent roster. Such names as Billy Walker and the Traveling Texans, The Wagonmasters, Dixie Boy Jordan, The Stamps Ozark Quartet, Lillie Mae, Doc Warren, Cousin Wilbur and Blondie, Hiram Higsby, Mac Macray and his Band - and Bill Mack and his Black Mountain Boys. All of these groups, although not big national names, presented a daily radio broadcast plus a Saturday night show which was broadcast from the Municipal Auditorium in Wichita Falls and usually played to a packed house. Giant names in country music were added as special drawing attractions on the Saturday night show. Bill Mack and his Black Mountain Boys were given a special thirty minute slot on the Saturday night show and with the help of my fan club, which hyped a select group of screaming teen-aged girls, we usually drew encores. These girls always occupied the first few rows of the auditorium on Saturday nights and I don't think it ever dawned on Blaine Cornwell, the Program Director and chief announcer on the show, that beyond the first few mentioned rows of my phoney idolizers the audience was either yawning, leaving for the respective rest rooms or complaining about the singing and instrumentals that me and my group were blessing them with. Blaine always seemed shocked at the applause and encores I received. He was not a musical performer, but even his tone-deaf ears surely detected that the young singer with the big Martin guitar left much to be desired as a country crooner.

It was at about this time that I received, through a fluke of luck, a recording contract with Imperial Records and a song writing contract with Commodore Music, both out of Hollywood, California.

I will never forget my first record. I had composed both sides of the fractured release. One side was titled WEDDING BLUES and the flip was crowned CRAZY BABY BOOGIE . Since Hank Williams was my idol, it was obvious that I was trying to sound like the giant on WEDDING BLUES . . . even having the nerve to attempt the Hank Williams country yodel. Needless to say - I failed. I also received a mild hernia in attempting to reach the high notes on the song.

Being a young man with no musical conscience, I succeeded in

talking the local juke box operators in Wichita Falls and my hometown of Shamrock in placing the record on their machines throughout the areas. I would then locate the cafes or beer joints that boasted the titles on their juke boxes, frequent these carefully spotted locales, slip coins into the boxes while the customers weren't looking and spend hours listening to myself whang "WEDDING BLUES" and "CRAZY BABY BOOGIE". As I look back on these memorable moments of musical pleasure, I remember that it was during one of these renditions that the drunks would sober up and go home in the taverns and the customers would cancel their food orders in the cafes. I should have also realized the failure of the release in my hometown when I noticed that my mother was using her first born's musical efforts as a pot holder.

Imperial Records was either extremely patient or unbelievably talent blind during this era since they kept me under contract for over three years and released such nasal nonsense as "MAMA, DON'T LOCK THE DOOR (Cause Your Baby's Comin' Home)", "I CRIED ALL THE WAY HOME", "BIG BAD DADDY", "I'M NOT FREE", "AIN'T IT A SHAME", "PLAY MY BOOGIE", "MEMORIES AND TEARS", "IT'S JUST LIKE A DREAM COME TRUE", "JOLE BLON ON THE FARM", "WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN" and several other torturous tunes by their newcomer. They even bought large ads in the trade magazines tempting the public with my recorded efforts.

One morning immediately following my radio show, I noticed that "WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN" was Number One in New Orleans in the leading cities' best-seller charts. I jumped with joy, was tempted to resign from the announcing staff at KWFT to hit the road as a singing star (which I am sure that KWFT would have rejoiced in hearing), inform my new wife that she should address me with a little more respect or face the threat of divorce and buy a new car. I did buy a new car although I "chickened out" on the other temptations.

Before the first payment was made on my new Olds 98, my record had dropped from number one to complete obscurity in the Billboard charts. It was a let-down to both me and to General Motors Acceptance Corporation where the payments on my new vehicle were due. My threat to replacing Hank Williams as America's Number One Country singer vanished within a month after "WHEN THE

SUN GOES DOWN" had been released! My record contract also expired.

Within a few months after my record contract with Imperial had expired, my band, The Black Mountain Boys, decided to desert me like a rat on a sinking ship. They went back to their better paying and more honest jobs as mechanics, bartenders, dish-washers and street beggars. I began to work as a single act without a band. My first job was for a dance using the house band with the V.F.W. Hall in Wichita Falls where I was over-paid \$25.00 for three hours singing. I must admit that the house band defeated the Black Mountain Boys in sound. However, I missed the old crew.

Bookings in local school auditoriums began to dwindle, my car was in danger of being repossessed by the local Olds dealer, my wife was threatening to leave me because of my moody spells and I was about to give up the singing business when I received a telephone call at home from my fellow disc jockey, Slim Willet. Slim had founded and was heading a Saturday night show in Abilene, Texas called the Big State Jamboree.

"You've got a big record goin' for you on KRBC!" said Slim.

"Really?" I doubted.

"I'm not kiddin', Bill! You've got a big record down here on my show. "WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN" has been number one on KRBC for the past three weeks. I'd like to have you down on the Big State Jamboree when you find an open Saturday night. When are you available?" He asked.

"This Saturday," I replied.

"How much will you cost me?"

Before I could quote my "goin'" fee of \$25.00, Slim interrupted with: "I haven't got too big a budget but if you could come down for \$150.00 this week I'll make it more the next time I book you."

"Do you want me to bring a band?" I asked.

"No," said Slim, "Just you."

"And you'll pay me \$150.00 - for just me?"

"I know it ain't much, Bill, but I'd sure like to have you Saturday night."

Proudly, I lied: "I usually get \$200.00, Slim, but since you've been playin' my record so good for me on KRBC I think I can do it." Before he had a chance to back out on the deal I added, "I'll be

there!"

Slim Willet put new blood in my veins and gave me \$150.00 worth of encouragement to keep my musical (?) spirits up. We became good friends. Slim would drive from Abilene to Wichita Falls and appear on my newly founded Saturday night television show and refuse any pay. He forced me to join Broadcast Music, Incorporated where I would receive radio and television royalties on the performance of my meager compositions. He encouraged my wife and me when our spirits were low.

"WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN" bounced back in the charts for some unknown reason and Slim, who was a great song writer, approached me one day with a song he had written. He wanted me to record it and presented me with a tape recorded audition of the song. He even offered me half of the writer's royalties if I would record it.

"The song is just not my bag, Slim," I informed him. "Besides . . . the timing is off on the song."

Slim tried to persuade me to record the new composition and I stood my grounds on the fact that I thought it was a bad song.

"I'll record 'TOOL PUSHER FROM SNYDER' (which he had also composed) on my album, Slim, but this thing is awful!"

"You're passin' up a hit, Bill!" He said.

Slim, the big man that he was, never let my refusal to record his composition come between our bonded friendship.

A few weeks later Perry Como recorded the song I had refused. It was entitled, "DON'T LET THE STARS GET IN YOUR EYES" and it became the No. 1 best seller in the Nation. It was to be recorded by over one hundred artists before Slim died in the mid-60s. It made him a wealthy man and proved my ignorance in song material selection. I often wonder, however, if I had recorded the song and accepted Slim's offer of 50% of the writer's credits and royalties if the song would have achieved the high merits it received.

I must say here that Slim Willet . . . my true friend from Abilene, Texas - was like a big brother to me until his untimely death. He would show up at the most unexpected spots where I was playing, hundreds of miles from Abilene, and pound the words of encouragement into me. I did record his next composition entitled, "THAT'S HOW I FEEL". I thought it was better material than "DON'T LET THE STARS GET IN YOUR EYES". It bombed out.

Slim Willet's death was a tremendous shock and heartbreaking experience to me. To this day I follow the many words of encouragement he spoke to me so frequently. The words I remember best are those he spoke in my home in Wichita Falls following a television show late one night: "Bill - grab the business. Don't let the business grab you. When it starts gettin' you down, get out!"

When Slim Willet passed away during the mid-60s I was on the golf course. My wife told me the tragic news at the club house where she had rushed after hearing the announcement on the news. I finished my lunch in the club house, picked up my golf clubs and played 18 more holes (something I seldom do). I didn't attend Slim's funeral or even send flowers. I couldn't accept the fact that such a strong man . . . and even stronger friend was gone.

A painting he did for me of "WINTER IN THE COUNTRY" is the first thing you will see when you enter my home.

With truck patches at house



CHAPTER ELEVEN

The days with KWFT in Wichita Falls under the guidance of Blaine Cornwell and Kenyon Brown were happy for me. I had the pleasure of working with some of the finest country musicians in the nation. Elmer Laurance, who had worked with "Little" Jimmy Dickens out of Nashville playing the steel-guitar, returned to Wichita Falls and played countless shows with me. I also played a number of personal appearances with Pee Wee Stewart who had played fiddle on many of Lefty Frizzell's first Columbia recordings. All in all it was a pleasant experience.

Although I loved to make personal appearances, my first love was disc jockeying. Somehow, I felt closer to my audience through my radio shows on KWFT. I had begun to feel a little more grateful for my position as a d.j. since the top recording artists would either call me daily or periodically drop by the KWFT studios for a visit. I struck up a very close friendship during the early 50s with such artists as Faron Young, The Wilburn Brothers, Webb Pierce, Johnny Horton & Tilman Franks, Slim Whitman, Lefty Frizzell, Johnny & Jack, Kitty Wells, The Maddox Brothers & Rose, Marty Robbins, Carl Smith, "Little" Jimmy Dickens, Johnny Cash & His Tennessee Two, Ernest Tubb and the great Bob Wills. There were many others who not only visited my radio shows but would spend time at my home while they were in Wichita Falls.

I was booking country music packages with the top stars in the auditorium at Wichita Falls, usually playing to packed houses. These were "Blue Ribbon" country music shows.

KWFT booked the big Hank Williams show in the Wichita Falls Municipal Auditorium in late January, 1952. I hadn't been with the station for a long period of time and was anxiously awaiting the momentous occasion to see my favorite country music star since I hadn't seen him perform except for the memorable Tri State Fair in Amarillo shortly after I had entered the broadcasting field with KLYN.

The day finally arrived for Hank's scheduled appearance and I noticed that the morning was exceptionally cold with thick clouds overcasting the city of Wichita Falls. As I drove to work about noon, I noticed that light snow flakes were falling on my windshield. I



Mayor R.M. Stovall signs proclamation of Bill Mack Day in Fort Worth, Nov. 30, 1970



HAL CHESNUT, WBAP Radio Manager (left) "He gave me the break of my life!" ROY ACUFF, "King of Country Music" on right.



With JOE LEWIS, a real great guy.



With HANK SNOW



JAY LEE WEBB and LORETTA LYNN



With RAY PRICE



With CHILL WILLS in Nashville



"Little Sweetie" - LORETTA LYNN



"LITTLE" JIMMY DICKENS AND STONEWALL JACKSON



WAYLON JENNINGS - We were D.J.s in Lubbock - clowning on WBAP



With JOHNNY CASH



With JEANNIE C. RILEY - I advised her not to go to Nashville!



The late LUTHER PERKINS, "BIG TILDA" & Me.

her by the auditorium since she had to be in the ticket office by 6 o'clock.

As I approached the Wichita Falls Municipal Auditorium, I noticed that cars were stalled on the icy street for several blocks. The vehicles were two abreast on both sides of the street for at least six blocks before we got to the auditorium. Then it dawned on the bookkeeper and me that the cars weren't stalled. They were parked! We also noticed that the auditorium parking lot was filled to capacity and that people were lined up, shivering in the cold, three and four abreast, completely around the auditorium waiting for the box-office to open! It was the greatest and most complimentary scene I have ever witnessed. I parked my car in a "No Parking" zone and rushed inside with the bookkeeper to aid her in allowing the freezing fans to get inside.

Both shows were completely sold out on what had to be one of the worst nights, weather-wise, in the history of Wichita Falls. The second show didn't start until almost 10:30 and ran until past 1:00 A. M. the following morning. Hank Williams was never in better form. I am sure that this was one night he realized his importance to his countless fans.

"Anybody fool enough to come out on a night like this to hear a hillbilly sing oughta be thrown to th' hogs!" He announced to the applauding audience.

Hank Williams referred to me as "Midnight" since I had awakened him in the wee hours of the morning over a year before during my tenure with KLYN in Amarillo. Everytime he would call me inquiring about one of his records, Hank would ask, "Hey, Midnight, how's my new one doin' on yore screwball show?"

Although I never knew Hank Williams very well on a personal basis, I knew he liked me and he knew I considered him the best in the business. He would call me from time to time or send word by one of the Opry acts from Nashville that he listened to me when within range of KWFT. Hank never asked me to play one of his records. I think HE was aware of the fact that I would automatically lay on it heavy after receiving it since I was such a fan of his.

I might add here that I have never seen an artist in any field of music completely control and excite his audience as did Hank. The magnetism was unbelievable!

turned on the radio to hear the noon news and weather and heard the newsman announce that Wichita Falls and vicinity were scheduled to receive snow.

By mid afternoon the streets of the city were completely covered with snow and you could hardly see the buildings across the street from the radio station because of the heavy snowfall. The temperature was in the teens. The station was discouraging street and highway travel and the schools of the area had sent all the students home by 2:30 p.m.

I was certain the Hank Williams performance would be cancelled because of the almost impossible travel conditions due to the ice and snow. Besides, we hadn't heard from Hank or any member of the scheduled show.

"Stay off the streets and highways!" The KWFT announcer warned.

There were to be two shows featuring Hank and his Drifting Cowboys that night with the first show scheduled to begin at 7:00 p.m. I had telephoned the Kemp Hotel, where the performers were scheduled to stay, several times throughout the early afternoon and the Kemp had informed me that none of the artists, including Hank Williams, had arrived. The station management had discussed the fact that it might be wise to announce that "due to the weather, the Hank Williams' Grand Ol' Opry Show had been cancelled". However, since a great number of advance tickets had been sold and there was a possibility that Hank and the group might still show up, they decided to leave the scheduled show alone and continue with the discouraging weather conditions and forecasts.

"Stay off the streets and highways unless there is an emergency requiring you to get out!" Urged the announcers.

About five o'clock, Hank's booking agent called KWFT and informed us that Hank Williams and the troupe had arrived at the Kemp Hotel and would be at the auditorium in plenty of time for 7:00 o'clock show even though they were sure that no one would be fool enough to brave the weather. I decided to leave the station about 5:30 and go home. I wanted to allow plenty of time to slide over the streets to my house, get dressed and slide back to the auditorium to catch what I was certain would be a short version of the Hank Williams show. The station bookkeeper asked me to drop

On January 1, 1953 I was scheduled to do the morning until 1:00 P. M. airshift on KWFT since I had been off on Christmas. My wife had gone to Shamrock to visit her parents and I was at the station alone. It was a dull day for me since the station was carrying only network broadcasts from CBS. I would periodically check the news wires since I had a local newscast every hour or so. I casually walked into the newsroom and glanced over the teletype machine while sipping my coffee. What I saw on the teletype print made me drop my coffee. "HILLBILLY SINGER DIES (They never referred to our artists as "country" in those days.)" I continued to read the release. "HANK WILLIAMS, WELL KNOWN FOR HIS RURAL COMPOSITIONS AND RECORDINGS OF SUCH HITS AS 'COLD, COLD HEART', 'JAMBALAYA', 'HEY GOOD LOOKIN' AND SEVERAL OTHER WELL KNOWN DITTIES DIED IN THE BACK SEAT OF HIS CAR EARLY THIS MORNING WHILE ON HIS WAY TO A PERSONAL APPEARANCE IN OHIO. DEATH PRESUMABLY WAS DUE TO A HEART ATTACK."

I was physically sick. To me, the world of country music had ended! I couldn't imagine that Hank had died at the age of 29. My entire show each day . . . my entire profession, really . . . had been based on the works of this great man!

I called my wife in Shamrock. I was unashamedly weeping. I asked her to come back home, immediately. I felt so very much alone.

With the sudden passing of Hank, an era had ended.



My pal FARON YOUNG

CHAPTER TWELVE

The great advent of television was to enter my life during the mid 50s.

I had seen such outstanding works as Kukla, Fran and Ollie, Ed Sullivan and Howdy Doodie while visiting relatives in the various areas where the tube had arrived. It was inevitable that KWFT would receive permission from the Federal Communications Commission to bring it's video masterpieces to the Wichita Falls area and the entire staff waited with short breath while Blaine Cornwell prepared to make the first appearance on Channel 6 announcing that KWFT-TV was officially on the air.

I had purchased a Philco television set several weeks before the projected date. My mother, dad, wife, a few relatives and neighbors gathered around the 21 inch monster while awaiting Blaine's image. We had all noticed that the test pattern was completely unreadable but put the blame on the television engineers with the presumption that they were working on the perfection of the picture. Finally, we all saw a familiar figure on the screen after the test pattern had faded and something resembling a waving flag dominated the twenty one inches during the playing of "The Star Spangled Banner".

"It's Blaine!" Screamed my wife. She paused and added, "or is it?"

"I think it's Blaine," I said.

The image of the screen was completely reversed in it's blacks and whites. The face was black and the teeth were black while the hair, eye lashes and hollow of the mouth were white. It looked like a photo negative. The voice, however, was that of Blaine Cornwell.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Channel Six!" He proudly boasted.

I fumbled with the knobs I was familiar with on the set but reached the same negative results.

"The station is all fouled up!" I exclaimed. "They're screwed up and don't even know it!"

I telephoned the KWFT switchboard to inform them that the engineers had idiotically put the station on the air in reverse order only to be told by the operator that the picture she was watching in the lobby and the reports she had received from the listeners was

that the picture was perfect.

"We're in a fringe area!" I shouted as I paced the floor.

"Call the neighbors and see how their picture is!" Suggested my wife.

"Our neighbors are all over here!" I replied. "We must have got a bad set! I knew that Philco dealer was trying to unload a bomb on us!"

I hurriedly dialed the dealer who had sold us the set while Blaine continued with his long welcoming speech. I began informing him that he was a crook and that I would immediately call the Better Business Bureau if he didn't justify his underhandedness. The dealer calmly told me that he would guarantee the set and rush a repair man to the house immediately. "You'd better get out here fast," I threatened, "or you'll be in jail by sunset!"

"Tell him to hurry!" Yelled my mother. "Blaine just announced that 'Crusader Rabbit' is coming on!"

"I thought he said Peter Rabbit," said my dad, who is hard of hearing.

The neighbors began to leave the house. Under whispers, they had decided to invade the home of a neighbor across the street whom they hadn't spoken to in two years but who had a new RCA television set. One of the neighbors had noticed the delivery truck a couple of days before. They all picked up a handful of the party treats my wife had prepared for the occasion and stumbled out the door toward the neglected neighbor's house.

Red Herring, one of my big-mouthed neighbors, slapped me on the back as he grabbed a bowl of cheese dip from our coffee table and said, "Them cheap sets just won't do the job, Bill! You ort to have checked it out before you invited us all over!" Before I could grab him, my wife stepped between us with an invitation for them to return. "If you git it fixed in time for the wrestlin' matches tonight, give Mabel a call!" He proudly announced. "Otherwise, we'll be across the street at ol' what's his names. If you don't git that cheapie fixed come over an' join us!" As he exited the door he added, "Mabel will bring these here bowls back to you in th' mornin'. Cain't promise no food in 'em, tho! Ha! Ha!"

"When is Peter Rabbit comin' on?" Asked my dad (who had never removed his eyeballs from the set).

"It's not Peter Rabbit! It's Crusader Rabbit!" Exclaimed mama.

Shortly, the television repair man arrived and was met by a cold welcoming committee. He walked to the set, looked at it briefly, twisted the contrast button (which I had never noticed) a fourth of a turn and brought in a perfect picture.

"Hey! That's a great picture!" I informed him.

"You just needed to adjust your contrast." He said with a look of impending massacre in his eyes.

"I didn't notice that little button was even there," I laughed. "How much do I owe you?"

"Nothin'," He replied. He gave me a dirty look and walked out the door.

"Hurry up and sit down, Billy!" Screamed my mother. "Industry On Parade is coming on. Whatever that is."

Before I could close the door I noticed that Red Herring and our fickle neighbors were returning to our living room. It seems that the neighbor across the street had prohibited them from invading his privacy.

"Did you git that cheapie fixed?" Asked Red.

"Yeah." I said.

"Are you sure?" Asked Red

"Yeah, I'm sure." I replied with disgust.

"Good!" He motioned to the other neighbors standing outside. "Y'all come on in! Ol' Bill got this cheapie to workin'! Bring th' food back in!" He crammed a handful of peanuts into his mouth as he gazed at the set and continued, "If th' thang don't work good I know an ol' boy on th' other side of town that's got a good un! We can all pile in over at his house in time to see th' wrestlin' matches!" Red placed his big fanny in the most comfortable chair available and ordered, "Turn up th' sound, Bill. Cain't hardly hear it!" Never removing his eyes from the set he crammed another handful of peanuts into his big mouth.

"When does Peter Rabbit come on?" Asked my dad.

"It's not Peter Rabbit," replied mom. "It's Crusader Rabbit! That was the rabbit that was on before Industry On Parade!"

"I didn't think that was Peter Rabbit," said Pop.

My first television assignment was every Monday, Wednesday and Friday on KWFT - TV. I was scheduled to present a 15 minute

show with a country band. Since the new studio had not been completed (the station was anxious to get on the air) we did the "live" shows from a small transmitter building that was crowded with engineers, soundmen, cameramen, cameras and technical equipment. The space was so small that I could only use a bass fiddle man and fiddle player to accompany me. The shows were atrocious! However, everywhere I went inside the Channel 6 viewing area people recognized me and asked for autographs. This was due to the hard-to-swallow fact that Channel 6 was the only station on the air from Wichita Falls at the time. Channel 3 had not yet hit the sets. My shows were sold out sponsor wise. During a fifteen minute show we were pushing the FCC permit for commercials.

A few weeks after Channel 6 hit the airwaves I was given a One Hour and Forty Five Minute program on Saturday nights called "The Big 6 Jamboree". Since we had the massive studio we allowed a huge group of people to enter the studios on Saturday nights to witness the live show. Video tape had not been perfected at that time and, as I said, everything we did was live. I utilized a five piece band to accompany me and hired local acts throughout the North Texas - Southern Oklahoma area to fill the extra long period of punishment. I also did my own "live" commercials for the sponsor.

Live commercials are the most damaging things that can possibly happen to a personality or a sponsor. For instance, I was sponsored by a freezer plan company and the commercial required that I open the freezer, brag on the merits of both the freezer and the food and ad-lib for one minute on the fact that it was not only a money saving plan but that the food was nourishing enough to re-vitalize the health of a terminal case.

The first night that the freezer plan sponsor was with us on "The Big 6 Jamboree" I walked onto the set, bragged about the beauty of the freezer, explained the money-saving features of the plan, exclaimed the nourishment of the vital foods that were to be found inside the freezer and attempted to open the white monster. The freezer wouldn't open. Someone had locked it to keep the ingredients from the hungry cameramen! I tugged on the freezer and it began to rock back and forth. I asked for a key and no one had one.

"You'll have to take my word for it! There's mighty good food

inside!" I blushed.

Finally, the director of the show ran on camera and handed me a key (this was in full view of the T.V. Audience) to open the freezer. Approximately two minutes of commercial time had lulled by and I clumsily attempted to open the freezer. I opened it only to discover that mere fragments of the food I had bragged about remained inside. The cameramen had succeeded in lifting most of the food items shortly after the contraption had been delivered to the station that afternoon.

Needless to say . . . the sponsor cancelled.

Since I had built up some sort of a name on television in the Wichita Falls area due to the fact that I was about the only local television personality (?) available who worked cheap, I was given the job of announcing commercials from an off-camera announcer's booth for "Friendly Fran the Homemaker". It was the most boring job I have ever encountered in broadcasting. Every morning, Monday thru Friday, I had to spend one hour with Friendly Fran . . . watching her prepare her nauseating recipes for the housewives and listening to her syrupy speeches on "how to keep the little man happy" with a good and exciting meal. Friendly Fran had been married three times and was really a terrible cook (we had the same hungry cameramen on this show as the Big 6 Jamboree and they testified to this fact).

"Here's an exciting dish, girls," she would brag. "This will really please the little master of the house when he comes home tonight!"

She would then proceed through a recipe of concoctions that would send even the hungriest dog to the garbage can. She would produce a beautiful cake or meat loaf from the oven. The finished product had, of course, been placed in the oven several hours before the show went on the air. I always suspected that the finished products came from Gene's Cafe down the street.

After the show was ended for the day Friendly Fran would then go into her daily ritual of bawling out the cameramen for bad shots, screaming at the director for allowing the bad shots to happen, telephone one of her ex-husbands and scream at him for being two days late in his child support payments and then shake her finger at me for mis-pronouncing "Friendly Fran" on her intro (I always seemed to stutter on the air when I hit the word "friendly" "And

now. . . here's F . . . F . . . Friendly F . . . F . . . Fran!" I would announce).

A few weeks with Friendly Fran passed and I became more bored with each passing day. One morning I decided to pull some of our old sound effects records and put them to use during the friendly homemaker's show. Since her speakers were off when she was on the air to avoid "feed-back", Friendly Fran couldn't hear what her announcer was doing in the announcer's booth. I had a great time! When she would lift one of her "feather light" cakes from the oven and set it on the flower shrouded table exclaiming, "Look how beautiful and light it is girls!" I would put the sound of two cars smashing together as she laid the delicate dish to rest on the table. She would then invite one of the lucky (?) cameramen onto the set to "test" her "mouth-watering" accomplishments with a meat loaf and I would release the sound of a rock-crushing machine for the viewing audience to hear as he bit into the morsel. The engineers and I thought it was hilarious! We thought we had discovered the funniest idea in television since "Amos and Andy". However, when the dull 60 minutes had lingered away the switchboard was ablaze with calls from the listeners. Most of the fans of Friendly Fan were complimenting her on her new approach of adding comedy to the dishes. Unfortunately, a few "die-hards" called the little homemaker complaining that the sound of cars crashing, rocks being crushed and burning barns seemed to relieve the show of it's intended class.

Friendly Fran wasted no time in approaching me with her daily finger-shaking ritual. This time it was obvious that there was more shake in the finger.

"How dare you?" She screamed.

"How dare I what?" I asked with a more than usual look of innocence.

"How dare you ruin my program?"

"How did I dare damage her damsel's show?" I asked.

"How dare you damage her damsel's . . . I mean . . . how dare you ruin my show with those damned sounds?"

"Easy," I informed her. Trying to be hilarious I explained, "I just took a record like this, placed it on a turntable . . ."

Before I could complete my explanation, Friendly Fran had exited the video control room and wobbled her shapely body to Ken

Brown's office.

Before the day was ended I received a memo from Mr. Brown's office asking me to "Apologize to Friendly Fran . . . make a public apology on my afternoon television show . . . promise that a disgracing and defaming incident such as the one that had occurred that morning would never happen again within the halls of Channel 6 and notifying me that I would not be required to participate in any way in Friendly Fran's programs following that day."

I was relieved.

Passing Friendly Fran, who was in tears, for the final time in the hallway of Channel 6 that afternoon I whispered, "I thought it was your best show, F . . . F . . . Friendly Fran!"

"Get out of my life, you monster!" she screamed.

My last view of Friendly Fran as I ran for my life down the hall was two secretaries and a janitor holding her away from me. I think she was attempting to toss a typewriter at me. The last word I received on Friendly Fran was that she was in Los Angeles doing a daily televised body building course . . . for men.



With Fort Worth columnist PERRY STEWART

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was during my television show, The Big 6 Jamboree, that the greatest blessing of my life almost occurred. My wife and I had been hoping for a baby for some time and had both given up practically all hope. It was almost Christmas and my better half began to have suspicious symptoms of impending child-bearing. She would rush to the bathroom to throw up with morning sickness and I would rush to my knees praying for a baby girl. Her doctor finally diagnosed her symptoms and casually announced to us that we could expect a new-born about July. We were both out of our minds with the happy news!

The month of July rolled around and my wife was the size of normal sized pregnant women of nine months but nothing happened. "Are you sure about that doctor?" I asked. She kept growing as July dropped by. Every time she would sneeze I would call the doctor. The first two weeks in August crept silently along and I was afraid for my wife to stand up, sit down or go to sleep. She craved watermelon and I was afraid that she was going to have one. She was the typical mother-to-be. Nature was protecting her from abnormal worries pertaining to the up-and-coming blessed event. Nature didn't protect the father-to-be and I was a nervous wreck.

On Saturday night, August 20, I arrived with my expectant wife at the television studios for rehearsal of The Big 6 Jamboree and was met there by Mr. Ellis Head, my friend and sponsor, and his wife. Just before 10:30, when the show was scheduled to hit the air, my wife complained of a small pain in her tummy. "Call an ambulance!" I screamed. My wife assured me that I was silly and that the small pain was probably something that she had eaten for supper a couple of hours before. About 10:25 p.m., five minutes before air time, she calmly informed me that Mr. and Mrs. Head were going to take her to the hospital because the pains were getting more numerous. I jumped around the studio shaking hands and yelling, "I'm a father!" Then it dawned on me what she had said. "I'm going with you to the hospital!" I shouted. She made me promise to do the television show and before I could reply I heard my television theme begin. "You're on the air, Bill!" Shouted my director. I ran onto the set trying to act calm. I knew I had revealed my

nervousness when my television audience and I discovered that I had forgotten to put my boots on. I always rehearsed in my sox.

I didn't inform the audience of the reason for my shattered frame of mind until I had pulled some very unusual tricks in front of the camera. For instance I proudly announced, "Don't ever let anybody try to fool you! The Ford is the best car for the money and Biggers Brothers will give you the best deal on a Ford!" Everything would have been alright except for the fact that my sponsor was Dennis Dodge!

Everytime one of the acts on the show would finish his number the cameras would come back to an unoccupied set. I would finally puff on to the set and announce the next number. The reason for my late set arrival was because I would call the hospital during every performance by another act to inquire if anything new had developed pertaining to my wife. I tried to desert the show about 11:15 but the director bodily forced me back into the studio.

"You want that baby to eat, don't you?" He asked. "You want that baby to have fine clothes and pretty little toys, don't you?"

"I sure do," I drooled.

"What kind of father-to-be are you, anyhow? You're taking food out of that unborn baby's mouth and cheating it of a college education already! Do you think that baby will be proud of it's father when it has to watch ol' dad standing in a bread line for the family meals?"

"No . . . it wouldn't, I'm sure." I replied.

"Then get back on that show and entertain them folks out there!" He shoved me back onto the set where I finally confessed to the audience that they were watching a father-to-be in action. This was one of the worst mistakes I have ever made. The hospital called the television station and informed them that their lines were jammed with people asking about my wife's welfare. They ordered me to ask the audience to please cease the calls to the hospital.

When the show finally ended and I rushed to the hospital to join my wife shortly after midnight I discovered that the hospital lawn was filled with people awaiting my arrival. I didn't get into the hospital until almost 1:00 a.m.

At 1:15 that afternoon, over twelve hours after I had joined my wife at the hospital, our beautiful Deborah Lynne (Debbie) arrived.

She was worth waiting for.

I've been aware of the loyalty of country music fans for many years. It was most evident when Debbie was born. Fans deluged our home with gifts of all descriptions for our beautiful daughter.

One of the most touching gifts we received was from a tiny old woman wearing a well worn and neglected print dress. She presented me with a hand sewn baby dress that I was certain her aged eyes had trouble in keeping up with. The dress was flawless. I'll never forget her words: "God gave you the big gift. Here is my little one."

Sometimes we as parents may clumsily forget and neglect God. I find it very hard to believe that any man, regardless of who he is . . . or how important or unimportant he may feel he is to his fellow man, can look at his new son or daughter in the nursery at the hospital and not feel that he has come face to face with God.

I am proud to say that Debbie was the most beautiful baby ever born (at least it seemed that way to her mother and me)! Her teenage years have just added more to her beauty.

With my daughter DEBBIE



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

As I mentioned earlier, the Wichita Falls days were some of the happiest and most memorable days of my life. Typical of the broadcasting industry, however, there were many moments to test the soul and temper.

As anyone in radio or television knows, there is always the fan you would like to rid yourself of. That is, a fan who develops an "uncontrollable crush" on the air man due to the fact that her husband neglects her in every way and through a daily ritual of listening to a pinpointed "lover of the airwaves", selects this poor disc jockey or television personality as her own. Psychiatrists tell us that these matrons, who come in all sizes and ages, actually develop a mother or wife/lover complex toward the innocent beings of broadcasting and it's easy to understand whenever you hear some of these Don Juans, especially in the rock field of broadcasting, blasting the tubes with such come-ons as: "Hello, baby! You look beautiful!", "This one goes out to Stacked Stella! Oh, what a gorgeous doll!", "This is the Kissin' Killer of the Kilowatts!", etc.

I can't remember what approach I used but I did have my fanatical fan whom I shall refer to, again for obvious reasons, as Bertha Hotbreath.

My first encounter with Bertha was when she telephoned me at the studios one morning after I had complained of a "crick" in my neck over the air and volunteered to meet me on an isolated road outside of the city to help me remove said "crick". For some reason, presumably the fact that my wife and I were happy together with our new baby daughter, I refused the invitation. I discovered that Bertha was not the type to be discouraged by mere "no, thank yous" when, while driving to my home that afternoon, I discovered a green Ford barreling in on me from the rear with it's horn blasting madly. I noticed that behind the wheel of the vehicle was a short, fat woman in her early 30s and presumed that she was on her way to a maternity hospital from her noticeable anxiousness to pass me. I pulled my car over to give her passing room and she pulled her whizzing vehicle in front of me, slid on her brakes and sent gravel flying over my car almost causing me to rear-end her. I finally succeeded in stopping my car only a few feet from hers and

discovered that she had already opened her door and was rushing to my car window. My first impression was that she needed aid and I stepped out of my car to greet her.

I asked, "Can I help you, lady? We almost had a collision!"

"Aren't you Bill Mack?" she asked.

"Yes, I am."

The squattie lady smiled and said, "I called you this morning. I'm Bertha Hotbreath!" she giggled and continued, "How's that terrible old crick in that sweet little neck?"

Had Bertha resembled Angie Dickenson I might have been tempted to go along with her. She looked more like Jack Elam in a short, stout fashion. I informed her that my "crick" was gone and I wished that she would do the same. I told her that I was in a hurry to get to my home and jumped back into my car. Bertha used a "let's don't beat-around-the-bush" type of approach. She ran around to the passenger side of my car and, before I could drive away, opened the door and jumped in beside me.

"Get out of the car, lady. Be a good girl and exit!" I ordered.

"Give me one kiss?" She drooled.

I then threatened to kick her out of my car if she didn't get out voluntarily. When I noticed the bulkiness of her backside I knew that I couldn't possibly miss should I decide to kick. I finally, after a few minutes of pleading, persuaded her to remove her flab. What she said through my window sent chills up and down my spine.

"I want to see your baby Debbie," she cooed. "I'm your neighbor! I live just down the street from you!"

"Get lost!" I shouted as I backed away from her and sped toward home.

I raced toward my house and noticed that the green Ford was holding it's own behind me. In order to lose her and not tip her on where I lived, I drove several miles out of the way through service stations, parking lots, shopping centers and down alley ways. I finally lost the determined dandelion.

When I arrived home I told my wife of the strange happening and we soon forgot the episode when we began playing with Debbie. Bertha Hotbreath had a longer memory, however. That night she telephoned our home. How she tracked down our unlisted telephone number I will never know. My wife answered the telephone to hear Bertha proclaim, "I'm your neighbor! I met Bill while driving home

today and I want to baby sit with Debbie for you whenever you two decide to go out."

My wife remembered the incident that had taken place that afternoon and informed the intruder that we wouldn't need her services.

Bertha then decided to shake up the lady of the house by shouting, "You don't know it but Debbie is my child!" She had temporarily forgotten that it's the wife who has the child.

My wife threatened to call the police and Bertha hung up her telephone. I wanted to telephone the police but couldn't remember Bertha's last name and had failed to get her license number.

My wife would accompany me from time to time on my personal appearances near Wichita Falls. One night as we were returning home we noticed a green car parked in the street in front of our house and I quickly spotted the fact that it was Bertha Hotbreath's! Bertha was standing on the lawn. When she noticed my wife and I she made a mad dash toward her car. My wife, in hysterics, ran to our house to check on Debbie and I ran after Bertha, catching her by the back of her dress as she attempted to enter her car. Our baby sitter, an elderly woman who was very kind, had admitted Bertha into our house to see and hold Debbie. Bertha had told her that she was a neighbor and friend of the family and, being very convincing to the baby sitter, had been allowed to spend a couple of hours holding our pride and joy before Debbie's bedtime. She had spent another hour carefully gathering information from the sitter on our family habits and, on bidding the baby sitter goodnight, had made her promise to let her return to our home to keep her company the next time my wife and I were gone.

My wife called the police while I held Bertha on the lawn of our house. In a few minutes two squad cars arrived and three Wichita Falls policemen began questioning Bertha Hotbreath. They finally got her address and telephone number. I suggested that rather than arrest her, they let me talk with her husband. After all, she hadn't really committed a crime.

Within a few minutes Bertha's husband arrived at the house and informed us that Bertha, who really was a neighbor, was "harmless". Before the night was ended we discovered that Bertha Hotbreath knew the exact times I left for work and my wife went shopping, my

parents' names and addresses in Shamrock (she had also called my brother who was in the Navy in San Diego by tracking him down through the military, getting him on a San Diego telephone and asked him for a "date" whenever he received his next leave) and the number of canned goods we had in our cabinet. Her husband finally informed the police that Bertha had been a frequent patient in the Wichita Falls Asylum for the Insane. He also promised to keep his better half home, assuring all concerned that she would never cause us anymore threats or problems.

I'm afraid that Bertha had other ideas. The very next day she called my wife and volunteered again as a baby sitter and saying, "Don't you think my daughter, Debbie, resembles me? I am her mother, you know."

The Wichita Falls Police Department had to take strict action against Bertha and succeeded in getting her off our backs.

It was an unfortunate situation. My wife and I felt sorry for Bertha Hotbreath after hearing the details of the tragedy of her mental life. However, we were in constant fear for Debbie.

As a post script to this story -

Just a few days before this book went to the publisher I was playing a benefit show in Fort Worth, when a man approached me backstage and informed me that a lady had "hitched" a ride with him from Wichita Falls and wanted to see me in his car for a bit of chit-chat. When I inquired about her name I was informed that it was my former neighbor - Bertha Hotbreath!

Over a dozen years had passed and Bertha was still on my trail.

This, I hope, is a very important tip from one disc jockey to another. Watch what you say on your radio and television shows. There are many ears who take you very seriously.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Shortly after forming my band in Wichita Falls we played the high school auditorium in a small town in Oklahoma called Delhi which is only a few miles from Erick. The place was packed to capacity and we were adjusting the public address system when a skinny kid shyly approached me with a fiddle in his hand. He walked up to me and stood around, silently, for a few minutes. I finally asked him what he had in mind.

"Some of my buddies want me to play my fiddle," he said.

"You mean you want an audition?" I asked.

"No . . . I wanta play my fiddle," he replied.

"You mean you want to play the fiddle on the show tonight?"

"Well . . . I don't 'xactly want to - but my buddies want me to play it," he said very softly. "If you ain't got time - to heck with it."

I could see that the undernourished youngster was more than anxious to be heard and I asked my guitar man to bring his instrument over to the side of the stage and accompany the Oklahoma boy in what had to be one of the shortest auditions I had ever given. The youngster quickly tuned his fiddle with the guitar, plucked the strings a few times with his fingers to assure himself that it was "tuned up" and dashed into a maddening rendition of "Bile Dem Cabbage", an old time fiddle standard. After he had completed what was undoubtedly a serious chore with the old instrument he began walking slowly away from me without receiving my reaction to his performance.

"Hey! Come back here!" I shouted. "That sounded pretty good!"

He stopped long enough to say "Thanks" and continued to walk away.

"Don't you want to play that thing on the show tonight?" I asked.

"I don't much care to play it," he muttered. "My buddies . . ."

I interrupted; "I know. Your buddies want you to play it. Well, you stay backstage here and I'll call you on after we get the show underway."

I caught the very faint glimpse of a smile of satisfaction as the kid nervously pulled up a chair backstage and sat down, delicately

holding his fiddle and bow in his hands.

The show had hardly begun when we heard shouts from the audience ordering, "Put ol' Rog on!" It dawned on me that they were probably referring to the skinny boy with the fiddle who was pacing back and forth in the wings on the side of the stage. It also dawned on me that I had forgotten, in my anxiousness to get the show started, to ask him his name.

While one of the members of my band was singing a song, I ran backstage and asked the boy his name. He informed me that the name was Roger Miller. "Stand by and I'll put you on right after this tune, Roger," I said. I dashed back on stage and announced that we had a local Oklahoma boy that we were going to bring on and before I could give him a proper introduction, his buddies occupying the first few rows of seats began shouting, "Git on out there, Rog!"

Roger didn't wait for me to announce his name. He slopped slowly on to the stage with his head down, looking up only long enough to sheepishly smile at his pals on the front rows. The rowdy Oklahoma boys again shouted, "Go git it, Rog!" and Roger began stomping his right foot like an eighty year old fiddler in order to set a "meter" for the impending production, placed the old instrument under his chin, struck his bow to it and went into one of the fastest presentations of "Bile Dem Cabbage" that I have ever heard. It wasn't exactly perfect as a musical accomplishment - but it was fast and loud. After Roger had completed his tune he attempted to walk slowly - very slowly - off stage. However, the audience went wild, screaming for "More!" It didn't take too much persuasion to get Roger back to the microphone.

"Git after it, Rog!" His buddies shouted again.

Roger went through the exact same ritual of stomping his right foot. I noticed that he began playing the same tune, "Bile Dem Cabbage", as his encore. After the second presentation of "Bile Dem Cabbage" he attempted to leave the stage again and was met with about half the audience response as when he played the tune the first time. I noticed that approximately 90% of the audience enthusiasm was coming from the first few rows. "Git back out there, Rog!" they screamed. Roger looked up at me and I invited him to do one more tune for his fans. I was afraid not to ask him since his cheering section resembled the Dallas Cowboys "Doomsday Defense" and I

knew that the five members of my group would be no match for them after the show. Roger again proceeded to go through the same preparations for his performance and again struck up "Bile Dem Cabbage". After the third helping, even his buddies had had enough and Rog hesitantly walked slowly off stage.

As we were loading the trailer in Delhi that night, Roger approached me and asked very nervously, "Do you ever need a fiddle man on your shows?"

"Sometime," I replied.

"Well - if you think I'm any good and can cut it with you - here is my address and a phone number where you can reach me in Erick. That is . . . if you ever come in need of a fiddle man like me."

He disappeared into the Oklahoma night and that was the last I was to see of Roger Miller for several months.

During the Christmas season that same year in the early 50s I was hired by a Dry Cleaning company in Vernon, Texas to supply the entertainment for their Christmas party. The day of the event my regular fiddle man was bedded down with the flu and there wasn't a fiddler to be found in or around Wichita Falls who was available to play the date with me. Suddenly, I remembered the skinny kid from Oklahoma. It wasn't too great a distance from Erick, Oklahoma to Vernon, Texas and, besides, I was sure the kid would work cheap. I finally tracked Roger down by telephone in Erick.

"Are you busy tonight?" I inquired.

"Lemme see." He paused a few moments, leaving the impression that he was checking his personal appearance schedule. Finally, he replied, "Nope."

"I'm playing a Christmas party in Vernon, Texas tonight. Do you think you can play it?"

"Thank I can," he replied softly.

"Are you sure you can play that fiddle?" I asked. "I've only heard you play 'Bile Dem Cabbage'."

"I can make out," he informed me.

"I'll meet you at the Suzie Q Cafe in Vernon at six o'clock tonight. Leave your buddies in Oklahoma, bring your fiddle and I'll see you tonight!" I said.

Roger was waiting for us at the Suzie Q when we arrived and followed us to the hall where the Christmas program was to begin at

7:00 that night. We hardly had time to set up our equipment and adjust the public address system before showtime. We didn't have time to rehearse any tunes with the newly hired fiddler. We struck up our regular tunes to open the show and I noticed that I couldn't hear the fiddle. I introduced each member of my regular band and finally got around to the Oklahoma violinist, explaining to the audience that he was "setting in" for our regular, ailing fiddler. I asked Roger to bless us with a tune. He stepped to the microphone, plucked the strings of his fiddle with his fingers a few short times, began stomping his right foot, placed the fiddle under his chin and, striking the bow to the fiddle, went into the familiar "Bile Dem Cabbage" and again met with an enthusiastic audience reaction although he didn't encore. I asked Roger to do another tune for the audience, anyway. He looked at me with the same shy look I had witnessed in Oklahoma a few months before, stomped his foot, put the instrument back under his chin and began playing "Bile Dem Cabbage" again. I was puzzled, the band was puzzled, the audience was puzzled - but ol' Rog seemed happy with what he was doing. I thanked Roger for entertaining us and whispered for him to turn his fiddle amplifier up since we couldn't hear him on the other tunes we were doing. Since it was Christmas, I announced to the audience that we were going to sing a medley of Christmas songs including such favorites as "Silent Night", "Jingle Bells", "Joy To The World" and other well known seasonal selections whereas the band struck up an intro to the announced specials. I noticed during the first song of the medley, "Silent Night", that the fiddle accompaniment blaring loudly in the background (Rog had turned up his fiddle amp) sounded astonishingly similar to "Bile Dem Cabbage". This was also true on "Jingle Bells", "Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer", "Joy To The World" and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"!

We took a short intermission and I asked Roger if he did or did not know any other tune rather than "Bile Dem Cabbage".

"Shore!" He replied. "I know lots of 'em!" I played some of 'em out there behind you when you was singin'!"

"But they all sound like 'Bile Dem Cabbage', Roger!" I exclaimed.

"Well . . . " he drawled, "my buddies back home like 'em that way."

I notified Roger that we wouldn't need him during the second half of the show, paid him twenty dollars and allowed him to hit the road back to Erick. Before he left he approached me with his battered fiddle case in his hand and asked, "When you gonna need me again?"

"I'll call you." I said.

Roger Miller disappeared into the cold Texas night and I wasn't to see him again for many years. We still laugh about that memorable night in Vernon.

Very needless to say, Roger Miller has since become an international entertainment giant. I might also add, however, that he still will play "Bile Dem Cabbage" for you - with a little coaxing. It still sounds the same.



LEFTY FRIZZELL and ERNEST TUBB

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The rock and roll rage began affecting all concerned with country music around the mid-50s. Fats Domino, Little Richard and the likes began to infiltrate the airwaves with such momentos as "I'M WALKIN'", "SLIPPIN' AND SLIDIN'" and similar sounds. This was also the era of the rock 'n roll disc jockey.

The rock 'n roll disc jockeys that I became acquainted with personally were quite a bit different from the country jockey. For instance - the country disc jockey would never refer to a member of his own sex as "sweetie" or "darlin'" or "angel". I can imagine what the reaction would have been had I called Slim Willet in Abilene and addressed him as "precious"! However, among the rock d.j. set this was a common practice. Even on the air it was not uncommon to hear one of these oddities scream to his audience something on the order of, "Here's my man Beardo Borgo with his new smaaash called "Swishhhin"! Sing it, baby! I love you!"

I also noticed that the rock jock considered himself quite a few notches above the poor, illiterate country (he called us "hillbilly") d.j. He seldom spoke to our breed whenever we would meet at some function that requested both grades to attend. He was also known to make fun of our music while doing his air show. ("Here's Johnny Horton singin' TH' BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS! Ha! Ha! Pick that guitar, hillbilly!")

A record company had a small get-together for disc jockeys and an artist on their label to promote the artist's new release. He was a very big name in country music but this was his first release to show promise of selling big in the rock field as well as in his chosen "country" market. I will refer to this artist as Hype Howard. We all met at the record distributing warehouse one chilly afternoon to be greeted by some of the label's top salesmen and public relations men. An ample supply of booze was also awaiting our arrival. I entered the building at the same time as a top rock d.j. in the city whom I shall refer to as Brucie Woosie. Brucie had the top show in the city at the time and as we entered the record men and Hype Howard dropped to Brucie's feet and, while polishing and kissing them, began a somewhat sickening session of bragging on Brucie's "out of this world" radio show. A couple of record men whisked Brucie to a

quiet corner where, from what I was told by men in the know, the great one was given a financial "token of appreciation" for what he had done in the way of helping sell Hype Howard's new "Rock" hit.

I don't believe anyone noticed my arrival with Brucie. Hype Howard, whom I had known and promoted for years, barely spoke. He did finally shake my hand gently and, running back to Brucie, say; "See you later, 'darlin'!" Even Hype, the former ol' guitar pickin', country singin' buddy from Nashville had abandoned the country scene for the greener pastures in the rock and roll field. It was quite evident that he wanted to evade me at the get together in fear that I might bring up a subject relative to the fact that he was a "former" country singer. He was finally forced into my company when the head of promotion with the record company came over to my table with ol' Hype hanging on to his arm. After a very small amount of idle chit-chat between the record man and me, the record man excused himself from our presence in order to catch a newly arrived rock 'n roll d.j. leaving Hype alone with me. I could easily tell that poor ol' Hype was ill at ease in his very tight fitting trousers (the type worn by the top stars in the rock field during the mid 50s) and bright yellow coat with matching yellow shoes.

"How's it goin', Bill baby?" He whispered. I noticed he looked around the room to detect whether or not one of the rock jocks might be watching or listening as he talked with a "hillbilly" spinner.

"I'm doin' fine, Hype. How's about yourself?"

"Got it made, sweetie! Yep! Ol' Hype is on his way up . . . up . . . up!! No more hillbilly stuff for me, baby! I've finally hit with th' buyin' crowd!"

Ol' Hype patted my shoulder and asked in a quiet tone: "How is everything in the country field, doll?"

"It's still holdin' it's own, Hype. You should know better than me! You're in the middle of it!" I said.

"I was in the middle of it," said Hype. "Looks like I'll be checkin' out of th' ol' hillbilly market for awhile. Like I said, my new record is breakin' big with th' kids! Th' big record buyers!"

"In other words, you're leavin' country music. Right, Hype?"

Hype rushed toward another rock jockey who had just entered the room, threw his arms around the delightful wonder and kissed him on his cheek. I noticed that the rock jock kissed Hype in return

and they walked arm in arm toward the bar. Hype completely ignored me for almost two years and I must admit that it really bothered me since the two of us had been very close friends for over six years and had shared very similar opinions about the business until Hype recorded a tune that began to show action in the rock and roll trades as well as the country market. Typical of several artists of that era . . . he chose the rock field and turned his back on the country fans completely.

Unfortunately for Hype Howard he only had the one record that made a move in the rock and roll industry and it wasn't nearly as big as the company and Hype had hoped. Another unfortunate fact that Hype had to face was that the country fans can spot a "betrayer" or "phony" a mile off and, once he shows his true colors, will turn their backs on him forever. They spotted both of these factors in Hype and completely severed any allegiance to him. Hype had been one of the biggest names in country music until he recorded the rock tune and began acting the part of a big-name rock 'n roll singer. During the short reign as a rock entertainer Hype was known to go on interview shows on radio and television and publicly state that he "never really cared for the country stuff." It is sad to recall that my old friend, Hype Howard, dropped completely from the country scene and best seller charts immediately because of his faulty move. He never was in demand in the rock field and, on the few rock shows that he appeared, he completely "bombed out". I saw him on a rock "Star Studded Festival" not too long after his one record had slightly penetrated the charts in the rock market and I had to leave the auditorium when I saw Hype dressed in a loud violet colored suit and matching shoes, swinging his hips as he sang and, when he had finished only one song, I saw the kids in the audience tossing pennies at him and begging him to "Get lost!"

All attempts at a comeback in the country field failed for Hype. It seems that too many disk jockeys and fans recalled his "putdown" of our brand of music. He dropped from a major record label to a small company where he had to pay for his recording sessions and promotions. Naturally, the first to turn their backs on Hype were the rock jocks, rock musicians and rock fans. He was a man without a market. He is still around - and bitter at the world. He is found on some of the minor tours throughout the Midwest as a supporting act

to the bigger names in country music and, occasionally, you will find him playing as a "single" act in some honky tonk. Gone, however, are the days when Hype Howard's records dominated the juke boxes and country record shows. Gone are the Cadillacs, pretty girls and idolizing fans. He does have his booze. More of it, in fact. He seems to drink more these days.

Hype Howard is bitter at the country music business today. He calls it a "back-biting," selfish and "wishie-washie" business filled with disloyal fans. Typical of any business, you may find some of these accusations warranted. However, the fans of country music are loyal to the end. As a matter of fact . . . they will go out of their way to hang on to an entertainer in country music even after he has committed unspeakable acts in his personal life. A country fan will shut out a country artist only after that artist has in some way betrayed the cause that made him popular with the fan . . . country music.

Hype Howard committed the unpardonable.



One of my favorite people, JERRY LEE LEWIS

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

One day in 1956 Ted Weber, an advertising executive for Mead's Fine Bread, approached me with the idea of using a country jingle to help sell their bread and asked me if I would be interested in writing and possibly recording a jingle for the company. I jumped at the idea since personal appearances were dropping due to the new rock craze. I hired Elmer Laurence to play the steel-guitar and a bass-fiddle player to accompany on an audition I had planned to record at the Nesman Recording Studios in Wichita Falls. I had written the jingle in less than ten minutes time and had little hope in selling it to Mead's Bread. With Elmer on the steel-guitar, me on the guitar and vocal and the bass-fiddle man, I warbled:

"Mead's Fine Bread is soft twisted,
Makes for better flavor,
Get Mead's Fine Bread at your store today,
And do yourself a favor . . .
That's what I said,
Mead's Fine Bread!"

(Copyrighted by Mead's Bread; Words & Music by Bill Mack)

Ted Weber took the audition tape to the chief honchos with Mead's and called me the next day informing me that they had decided to use the jingle. I was beside myself with the good news! "When do you want us to record it?" I asked.

"We're taking the jingle as it is," said Ted.

"You mean you're taking the jingle with just three instruments on it?"

"That's right," Ted informed me. I found out later that the company didn't want to put too much money into the jingle until they were certain it would sell the product. Mead's sent what I had intended to be an audition jingle to the radio stations throughout Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico with my voice singing the praises of "Mead's Fine Bread".

Within a few weeks the jingle caught on like wildfire. It even made the popularity charts on several radio stations (this was unheard of at the time) and the Mead's advertising department had my three-man combo working day and night at Nesman Recording Studios turning out the hit jingle for radio and television. Not having

a business manager and since this was my first endeavor in the jingle business, I did the jingles for very little pay and even signed the copyright over to Mead's. However, the little jingle brought me more popularity than anything I had ever done in the entertainment business prior to that time and I was pretty well in demand to record (and compose) jingles for other companies.

A special committee approached me to do a jingle for Bill Blakely who was running for the Texas Senate seat. It seems they needed a campaign jingle. I composed the jingle and had it on record (again with the aid of Elmer Laurence and his steel-guitar and the bass-fiddle man) within an hour. The campaign committee used my ditty as the official campaign song for Bill Blakely and hired me and my band to accompany Mr. Blakely on his campaign tours. It was an unforgettable experience . . . and the pay was very good.

A committee representing a politician from Oklahoma asked me to compose and record a jingle for their candidate. I wrote it, recorded it and they accepted it as the official campaign song of their hopeful. Their hopeful lost . . . and their check for my jingle bounced!

Over 300 different recordings of the Mead's jingle have been produced by me since 1956. The account has changed agencies several times . . . many with the idea that we should present a new concept to the little ditty . . . but the jingle has remained the same with Elmer Laurence on the steel guitar, a bass man (we've used several different bass-fiddle players) and me on the vocal and guitar. Elmer has been with me on every jingle since that memorable morning in 1956 and we are still writing and recording:

"That's what I said . . . Mead's Fine Bread!"

It's made a lot of dough.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

During the late 50s I decided it was time for a change. I was in a deep rut at KWFT and my enthusiasm had dropped to the zero point. As I mentioned earlier, the men whom I had admired and leaned on for guidance had moved on to other markets since KWFT had been sold and I couldn't retain any personality on my radio shows to suit myself although the fan mail was as big as ever. I wanted to try a new locale and attempt to regain my enthusiasm.

I accepted a d.j. job with my old buddy Dave Stone at Radio Station KDAV in Lubbock. Dave is one of the most devoted fans of country music I have ever known. He not only owned the station but had that secret and seldom found ingredient of making a station a success. He loved country music! KDAV, although only a daytime operation, was the most commercial station I've ever worked for and, through the guidance of a man who believed in what he was doing, was one of the most successful radio outlets I've ever heard of.

Working in Lubbock while I was there were such brush-apes as Arlie Duff ("Y'all Come"), Waylon Jennings (he was struggling as a disc jockey and song-writer), Buddy Holly, Don Bowman and several more names who were to become outstanding entertainers following the Lubbock days. It was during my tenure with KDAV that Buddy Holly and J.P. "Big Bopper" Richardson lost their lives in a plane crash. Buddy's parents were my neighbors.

I loved Lubbock but the chances for advancement in broadcasting were at a stand-still.

In November of 1959, I accepted a job as Music Director/morning disc jockey with KENS in San Antonio. This was my first job with a 50,000 watt giant (680 kc. on the dial) that blasted the country during the daytime hours. KENS dropped it's power to 10,000 watts at night. These were some of my happier days in radio. I worked with Charlie Walker, Neal Merritt, Ray Baker, Joe Simpson and a crew of great disk jockeys . . . and the pay was very good.

Unfortunately, country music hadn't yet achieved it's success and, although KENS was making big money and producing a big sound for country fans, the new owners decided to change from a country music to a "sweet music" format. This decision sent most of

us down a very familiar trail for the disk jockey. Job hunting.

I love Fort Worth and Dallas! I've spent most of my broadcasting years in this giant market in Texas. However, the first few years in my favorite area were some of the most confusing and discouraging years I've ever known. Whereas the Wichita Falls and San Antonio days had been days, weeks and years of harmony among the disk jockeys, I noticed that it was quite the opposite in the Fort Worth - Dallas area. Everybody in country music seemed to be on guard! Instead of complimenting a fellow disk jockey on a successful accomplishment, it seemed that the d.j. (behind his back, of course) became the subject of ridicule, mockery and antagonism. Jealousy was the rule among the country music stations in the Fort Worth - Dallas area during the 60s. I'll never forget the reception one "fellow" disk jockey gave me on my first day with the station. I extended my hand to him (I had known him for years) only to have him turn his back on me. He would never speak or return a greeting. I was finally told by another disk jockey what was bugging the wonder of the airwaves. It seems I had signed with a major record label and he was unable to obtain a recording contract. This made me his enemy!

I see-sawed between the two country music stations in the Fort Worth - Dallas area for several years and I must admit that country music was at a lower ebb in this market than any other market I could think of. It finally dawned on me that instead of all the disk jockeys, recording artists, composers, etc. getting together for the common goal of promoting country music in general, they were approaching it on a strictly personal basis. It was dog-eat-dog and forget-your-fellow-man type of operation! Of course there were exceptions, such as Dewey Groom, Ed McLemore and a few others who worked diligently, untiringly, and spent a wad of their own money trying to bring country music up to a respective level in the area. Outside of this very respected few, however, was an almost hopeless situation based on mistrust and near-hatred.

I was receiving more than my share of opportunities in the giant Texas area including a live television show entitled COWTOWN JAMBOREE from Panther Hall Ballroom in Fort Worth and BIG D JAMBOREE, in Dallas, both on Saturday nights. I would rush from Cowtown Jamboree in Fort Worth to the Big D Jamboree in Dallas,

performing on both shows every Saturday night. I was also doing my daily radio shows and was emceeing a taped radio series with the great Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys which eventually led the way to a weekly video-taped television show with the master of western swing. With all of these things going for me, I was automatically put on the "black-list" of my d.j. buddies in Fort Worth and Dallas. As I remember . . . not one of them ever congratulated me on one of my endeavors. They would simply remain silent.

Bob Wills was my country and western idol! I had first met him while he was performing in my hometown of Shamrock. When he asked me to be his radio and television announcer I was dumbfounded! I would stand in absolute awe during every broadcast and telecast as I watched the great man at work.

Bob Wills was one of the fortunate few who possessed magnetism. An audience would crowd around the bandstand when he was on just to watch him hold his fiddle, raise his eyebrows, smoke his cigar and, wearing his white cowboy hat and boots, jump to the microphone periodically and yell his familiar "Ah . . . ha!"

My fondest memories of Bob pertain to a few unnoticeable, trivial facts that the audience never observed. Things such as the small rash and beads of sweat on the back of his neck when he was embarrassed or under pressure.

We taped our daily radio shows before a live audience in Town Hall at Seminary South Shopping Center in Fort Worth every Monday. Of course, the shows were free to anybody who wanted to attend and we usually taped before an audience of 500 and we would tape five 15 minute shows at each Monday session. It was great fun for both Bob and me in the beginning but, after awhile, the shows became quite a chore for Bob and I noticed the rash and beads of sweat appear more frequently on the back of his neck.

One of the most treasured memories of Bob Wills is his sincere devotion and friendliness to his many fans. They would actually mob Bob preceding and following his radio tape sessions and I never once saw Bob neglect one of his followers. He always took the time to chat and sign autographs. More than a dozen times I have seen fans who were at least ten years older than Bob grab him by the coat, pull him aside and scream in his ear, "I've been listenin' to you since I was just a baby!" Bob always thanked them.

I remember one gentleman in particular who attended every single Bob Wills tape session. He was a few years older than Bob and was constantly trying to corner him in order to get him to listen to a "few songs" that he had written for Bob. Bob, like most performers, shied away from uninvited song writers. However, this gentleman was more persistent than most and would catch Bob in the hallway every Monday, grab him by his coat and yell, "Bob! I wrote this special song for you! You gotta hear it, Bob!"

"Don't man handle me!" Ordered Bob.

"You'll be awful sorry, Bob! Awful sorry if'n you don't hear this song I wrote for you!"

Realizing that he would be met by the pest on a weekly basis if he didn't listen to the creation, Bob finally told the man that he would listen to the tune on one condition, that condition being that the writer would never approach Bob again if he didn't go for the song. The songwriter agreed and, holding Bob's lapel while he had him cornered in an isolated spot back stage, began explaining to the great star the reason he had written the song.

"You know, Bob, when Hank Williams died they didn't have many records in the backlog to release on him. Right?"

"Right," replied Bob, the rash on his neck more noticeable than ever and beads of sweat dropping onto his collar from the back of his neck.

"Well, when you die, Bob, I've got a song wrote 'specially for it! People will love it! It's called 'TH' WHOLE WORLD CRIED WHEN BOB WILLS DIED!'"

The astonished Bob turned white. Without saying a single word to the man, Bob had his guitar man to see the gentleman to the door.

Bob was obviously "shook up" throughout the entire session that day.

As I previously announced and as all died-in-the-wool Bob Wills fans realize, the trade-mark of this giant artist is the familiar "Ah Ha!" shouted by Bob throughout all of the tunes he performs on record or on stage. As a matter of fact, if fans don't hear the "Ah! Ha!" throughout the tune, they detect the flaw immediately.

Back in the 1930's Uncle Art Satherly produced practically all of Bob Wills' big hits on Columbia Records. "San Antonio Rose", "Take Me Back To Tulsa", "Big Beaver" and countless more smashes

featuring Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys had become household words to the record buying public. During the early 40s, Bob and his band were breaking house records all over the United States on their personal appearances and the demand for Bob Wills records was unbelievable! Columbia would record Bob anytime they found him with enough free time. Uncle Art would record Bob in recording studios when possible. However, he would also grab the Columbia recording gear, follow Bob to a ballroom or hotel and record him at these places when necessary.

Uncle Art had arranged to record a session with Bob on the Mezzanine of a large hotel. At the last minute, Uncle Art had to cancel his appearance with Bob because of illness and, rather than cancel the hard-to-come-by Wills recording session, he hired a typical Madison Avenue record producer, who was completely ignorant of Bob Wills and country music, to ramrod the event.

The Madison Avenue Wonder screamed: "Take one! Everybody quiet!" The big session with Bob was underway with a group of people standing around the hotel witnessing the great man in action. The Bob Wills aggregation hit into their first rendition of the record session and had hardly begun when the New Yorker screamed: "Cut! Bust it! That's no good!" Bob looked at the man in amazement since he hadn't heard anything go wrong with the "take". "You folks here in the hotel keep quiet, now, if you want to watch Mr. Wills record!" He pointed to the engineer to roll the recording equipment and screamed: "Take two! Everybody quiet! Roll it!" Bob and the band smashed into the tune for the second time only to hear the producer scream at the top of his lungs: "Cut! Bust it, dammit!" He turned to the audience and yelled: "I'm warning you folks in here one more time! Either keep quiet or we'll have to clear you out of here! I mean it!" Bob remained quiet but still looked at the young New York producer in amazement. "I'm sorry, Mr. Wills. I think we have it ready to go now. I don't anticipate anymore trouble with these hicks!" He gave the audience another glare, pointed to the engineer to begin the recording equipment for the third time and screamed: "Take three! Now let's make this a good one! Everybody quiet! Roll it!" Bob and the band struck up the tune for the third time and heard the familiar, "Cut it! Bust it again!" The superman of sound threw his earphones onto the table and rushed toward the onlookers

with fire in his eyes only to be stopped by the astonished Bob Wills.

"What's th' matter, young fella?" Asked Bob.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Wills. I'm going to have to clear the lobby! We just can't seem to get the session going because of some jerk . . . some drunk jerk . . . screwing it up for us!"

"I didn't hear anything wrong," said Bob, quietly.

"You don't hear that drunk out there in the audience somewhere?"

"No." said Bob.

"Well," said Madison Joe, "I don't know who it is doing it out there but he sure is feeding through on our session! Just about the time you get started with your number the smart alec drunken slob screams 'Ah! Ha!'"

Bob canceled the session, sent the Madison Avenue expert back to New York and awaited the recovery of Uncle Art.

Bob is ill at the present time at his home here in Fort Worth. However, it must be a "health boost" to know that you hold house records all over the world, have millions of fans pulling and praying for you and will always reign as the "King Of Western Swing".

There is and always will be only one Bob Wills. And he is my friend.

As I am sure you have noticed thus far in this book, country music has been good to me and I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a part of the great industry. Of course, as you also have noted, there have been moments of despair. For instance, I found myself in the middle of a "hive" of "Top-40" disk jockeys who tried, unsuccessfully, to be country d.j.s in the late 60s. Not only were the disk jockeys phoney, the station manager and his "yes-man" program director, a "bubblegum bombout" (ex top 40 d.j.), performed a daily ritual of putting me down and trying to make life miserable for me because I was "too country" for them. Although the program director never put me down, personally, he would hop scotch to the manager's office every time I played a record by Ernest Tubb, Hank Thompson, Loretta Lynn, etc. and the two of them would parlay about what action they should take to make my job so miserable that I would resign. The manager didn't want to fire me because it would require that he forfeit two weeks severance pay. I was usually required to make an appearance at the

little manager's office following each of my morning shows during the final weeks I was with the station.

"What was that crap you were playing this morning on your show?" He would ask.

"That was country music!"

His eyes would bulge and his mouth would water as he continued, "I heard you playing some 'bluegrass' music on your show this morning! I thought you were ordered not to play bluegrass!"

I couldn't remember playing any bluegrass music that morning and I asked the short one, "Who was doing the bluegrass tune? I can't remember playing any bluegrass!"

"It was some corn-ball thing by Bob Wells!" He shouted.

"You mean Bob Wills, don't you?"

"Bob Wills, Bob Wells, whoever it was, it was awful! No more bluegrass . . . do you understand?" The wee one began to turn blue with anger.

"Bob Wills doesn't play bluegrass! He plays 'western swing!' I informed shorty. "The tune I played was 'San Antonio Rose!'"

The boss, whose fangs were beginning to show by this time, made a typically stupid statement: "I heard a damned fiddle on it!"

"Bob Wills plays the fiddle!" I said.

"No more Bob Wills!" He screamed, his voice resembling a trapped crow.

I informed his grace that Bob Wills was one of the most respected names in show business, lived in Fort Worth and by not playing his records the station would be performing an act similar to spitting on the Texas flag. His reply was: "I said it and I mean it! No more Bob Wills on this station! Do you hear me?" He then began running around his office stomping his small feet into the plush carpet. The program director rushed into the room acting like he had come to the rescue of Super Leader.

"What's the matter, chief?" Asked the program director.

"I heard Bill Mack playing bluegrass music this morning! I want all the Bob Wills records pulled out!. Understand?"

"Yes sir! I agree with you, chief!" Roared the boy wonder. I believe that it was at this point that the two began hugging each other. They were still holding each other, trying to ease the pain and

embarrassment of having to work around a "hillbilly" disk jockey, as I left the office.

"Remember, Mack . . . no more Bob Wills!" Shouted the fierce one.

"And no more Ernest Tubb, Loretta Lynn, Hank Thompson, Bill Monroe or Roy Acuff!" Shouted the program director. "Let's cut out that country crud!"

In order to live with myself, I performed one of the most self-satisfying acts of my life. I resigned from the phoney filled facsimile of a country station and informed the Weird One what he could do with his radio towers, transmitter and studios!

The last I saw of Little Chief and his program director "side-kick", they were both running around the office, hand-in-hand for consolation, screaming, "Hillbilly! Hick! Hillbilly!"

As a post-note to the unusual antics of the radio station I just mentioned . . .

When Bob Wills became ill from a stroke in 1969, radio stations throughout the nation were presenting Bob Wills Days in tribute to this great star while artists in the country music field were donating their time and talent in various clubs and auditoriums presenting special benefits to raise money in order to help pay the ultra high hospital expenses for Bob. It was inevitable that a show would be presented in Bob's hometown of Fort Worth. Dewey Groom, always there when needed, and a few more real people of country music joined together preparing the Bob Wills benefit in the Fort Worth - Dallas area.

I was informed that the country (?) radio station not only refused to play Bob's records (he was too country) to help promote the occasion . . . they also charged the promoters money to run announcements promoting the benefit!

At the benefit I asked one of the disk jockeys from the station, who actually had the nerve to show up, about the humiliating attitude they had taken about Bob Wills.

"Just because we don't play him doesn't mean we don't respect him!" Wheezed the wonder of the airwaves.

You figure that one out.



BILL and his good friend BOB WILLS during the taping of a radio show at Radio Auditorium in Fort Worth.



H.W. WINDHAM and FRANK RICH 2 Redball Drivers gave me an award I cherish from my pals - the Truckers.



With CHARLIE WALKER, ex San Antone, d.j., Pal



.With CHARLIE PRIDE

With Mr. JIM BYRON general manager of WBAP Radio & TV

CHAPTER NINETEEN

My next stop was Oklahoma City where I programmed KLPR for my friend Jack Beasley, one of the funniest and unusual men I know in radio and taped the Buck Owens syndicated television show from WKY-TV. I enjoyed working with Jack, managed to "smile through" the Buck Owens shows (it's hard to smile after your nerves have been jangled by listening to "TIGER BY THE TAIL" two dozen times in succession . . . including, of course, rehearsal time), but had a longing to get back to my Texas. I missed the Fort Worth - Dallas area immensely.

One cold February morning in 1969 I received a telephone call from an old buddy, Hal Chesnut. Hal had just become manager of WBAP radio and it seems, being an old "hillbilly" himself, that he had an idea I "might" be interested in. He asked me if I would be interested in doing a night time country music show on 50,000 watt, clear-channel WBAP (820 kc) in Fort Worth. I told him I was interested and asked him how much it would cost me (I was willing to pay Hal to let me do the show)! The next day I was in Hal's office in Fort Worth and within eight hours we had made a deal and begun formulating plans for what was to be the most gratifying, rewarding and happiest move I had made in broadcasting.

I had known Hal Chesnut for over a dozen years and I knew he was a country music fan with a great knowledge of how country music should be presented. There was to be no apologetic approach to country music on WBAP! No "blacklists" of artists! No such stupid words as "too country"! I was given complete freedom on the show which began in the early morning of March 2, 1969. That "freedom" along with a genuine comfort in working with Hal, the fellow disk jockeys such as Don Day, Don Harris, Jim Baker, Don Thompson, Gary Cooper, Mike Hoey (believe me, they all love country music!) and the rest of the WBAP crew has made the past two years the greatest years of my life in radio. WBAP is now "full time country" and Hal Chesnut, with the aid of program director Don Day, has proven that his outlook on the presentation of country music is right. WBAP has the greatest overnight success story of any country music station in the nation today!

Would you believe it? Hal Chesnut likes George Jones, Roy

Acuff and Ernest Tubb!

The telephone has played a most important part in the Bill Mack Open Road Show since that memorable opening night in March, 1969. It has never stopped ringing. With the aid of Big Tilda (my 298 lb. private secretary), Maybelle, Fast-Fingers Freda, Suzie Bush, Sharon, Susan Alexander and the special guests who man the phones when they drop by, we have answered and acknowledged telephone calls, thousands of them, from every state in the nation (including Hawaii and Alaska) and several foreign countries. I have received mail from such places as Ireland, Australia, Viet Nam and the Apollo 9 Tracking Ship, Redstone. It has been great! I also found myself in competition with two old friends . . . Ralph Emery at WSM, Nashville and Mike Hoyer with WHO in Des Moines. I might add that they are still, and always will be, old friends.

My first telephone call on March 2 was from a trucker. The last telephone call I received this morning, over two years later, was from a truck driver. I can say, without exceptions, that the trucker and Bill Mack have become very close buddies. I call them the Knights of the Road.

My first memories of childhood are those of traveling with my dad as he hauled cottonseed in his truck from Shamrock to Amarillo. I also traveled with my dad as he delivered gasoline and gravel in his trucks. Pop also operated various service stations in Shamrock when I was a kid. I suppose that this is the reason I respect the trucker so very much. I know a little about this special type of man. I believe the truckers know I am serious whenever I brag on them or mention their good deeds on the road. They, like the genuine country music fan, can spot a phoney a mile away! He may look a little grubby at times because of "pushing the miles", but give him a hot shower, a razor, and a few hours to catch up on his sleep and he becomes the epitome of a real business man. He is a business man! Don't ever try to pull the wool over his eyes! This man (or lady) has probably seen more of this nation and is better informed on it's world affairs than most business men you will meet downtown. He is a gentleman. However, as any truck stop operator or waitress will tell you, he can be very outspoken and not-so-gentle at times! Give him a tough steak after he's paid a good price for it, or a cold cup of coffee after he's been fighting the road all night and he'll be the first to let you know

he's more than simply peeved. He knows, appreciates and demands good food for his stomach and good service for his rig . . . and is more than willing to pay good money for it. Give him a fair chance, treat him with the respect he deserves, and you've got a staunch friend. Try to underhand him, give him the short end of the stick or attempt to play him for a "sucker" and he'll turn his back on you for life! He'll give you the shirt off his back if you need it, loan you a ten if you're short on change (never expecting you to pay him back) and leave you an adequate sample of the goods he's hauling (fish, meat, produce, etc. I've received a ton of "samples") and never expect anything in return . . . except respect. He has mine!

I've met every kind of driver and can say, in all honesty, that I've never met one that I didn't like! Hundreds have "dropped in" to see me while I was on the air. They've come from California (one of them took our big WBAP sign down when his rig didn't quite make the clearance. He was a gentleman. We were actually glad to see the old sign go but he was genuinely embarrassed and sorry that his rig had taken it down for us.), Wyoming, Kentucky, Arkansas, Minnesota . . . you name the state. We've met representatives from all of them!

One of the most unusual truckers I've met is a fellow named Joe West with A.B.F. out of Arkansas. Joe is also a song writer and recording artist on the side. He is also a fat, big hearted old boy who is liable to show up at any unexpected time with a head chocked full of ideas for fun. He was one of the first truck drivers to visit my show, bringing me his new release on a minor label entitled "JUST ME, THIS OLD TRUCK AND MY LORD". To say that I was on the defensive regarding the record would be an understatement. However, Joe was a trucker who looked eager to have his new record played on my show and I decided to give it a spin without auditioning it. I was certain, of course, that it would be a dud. I was wrong! No sooner had the record faded when the telephone became jammed with calls asking me to repeat it. I thought ol' Joe had hyped some of his friends into calling me until I realized that it's almost impossible to get the request line. I was getting calls from all over the world asking me to repeat "JUST ME, THIS OLD TRUCK AND MY LORD"! Truckers' wives were calling me, crying and begging me to play it again for their husbands scattered throughout the world. I

played the record three times that night and still, two years later, get a tremendous amount of requests for the recitation. I've never heard it played on any other station. Without a promotion man (except Joe, himself), distributor (Joe leaves them at truck stops all over the country), or major label to back it . . . "JUST ME, THIS OLD TRUCK AND MY LORD" has sold almost 50,000 records. It couldn't happen to a finer ol' boy!

As I have said, truckers are always bringing "goodies" by WBAP for me. I know I'll never go hungry as long as I do the all night show. I've received hundreds of pounds of such items as catfish, lobster (still kickin'), steak, sausage, all kinds of fruit (including some I had never heard of, from the Islands), bakery items, a St. Bernard dog (from Bill's Truck Stop in Amarillo) named Bruno, a genuine, real live rattlesnake from a West Texas bull hauler (which I gave to James, my security guard. He wanted "something different" to give his wife on her birthday), ten dozen eggs (in one shipment), live chickens and turkeys, frozen chickens, turkeys and Rock Cornish Game Hens, a baby pig and, the only gift I was forced to refuse, a small monkey. The monkey didn't like me from the very beginning and pulled my ears, bit my finger and made faces at me throughout the night. Besides, I think he belonged to the trucker's wife and he, in a moment of anger with her, was pawning the little creature off on me.

Another unusual man behind the wheel is H.W. Windham, a Red Ball driver out of Dallas. Windham travels the Dallas to Louisiana route for Red Ball and is always calling cajun and creole recipes into my show. Some of these, I might add, have been complete failures. Even the neighborhood dogs have turned them down! Windham also keeps me well informed as to the actions of the other Red Ball drivers such as Frank "Hot Lips, Rich and Suit case" Phillips. I don't know where Frank Rich received the nickname "Hot Lips" but I do know the story behind "Suitcase" Phillips.

Phillips was never very lucky at finding profitable items such as hub caps, rejected fenders, items that had fallen from other trucks, etc. on the road. It seems that the other drivers were always finding lost items and selling them when they returned to their base. One morning Phillips noticed a brand new suitcase on the side of the road. His luck had finally changed! He stopped his truck, backed it up a few yards, got out and attempted to pick up the new Samsonite

only to hear a deep voice from the dark of the night growl: "put that damned thing down!" It seems that the suitcase belonged to a hitch-hiker who had been dozing on the side of the road. Phillips drove away, embarrassed.

I also hear, from Windham, that Phillips walked into the wrong rest room a few weeks ago. It was one of those rest rooms where, instead of LADIES and MEN on the door, they use characters resembling a man and a woman to indicate which is which. Phillips, in a hurry, couldn't tell the boy from the girl . . . walking into the wrong one. There was a scream, an "I'm sorry, lady" and a red face from a Red Ball driver.

Windham also has a little joke he pulls on the drivers to break the monotony of the road. It seems he pulls out his false teeth and makes funny faces at his approaching drivers! I've had drivers tell me that he looks better when he performs such an act!

I must mention Chuck The Chicken Hauler. It seems that Chuck (a fictitious name utilized in order to save his job) actually hates chickens. He drives out of Alabama and rides herd on live chickens which stick their necks out of the cracks in the trailer. Chuck, when stopped at a service plaza somewhere, walks beside the trailer with a stick, slapping the chickens heads back inside. He tells me that waitresses frown upon him when they notice that instead of furniture, bulls or produce, he is transporting the "world's most stupid creature"! He is very much in favor of Colonel Sanders and believes the old man is performing a great service to the world in ridding it of chickens.

Chuck The Chicken Hauler informs me that in order to "beat the weigh station" he bangs on the trailer with a stick while the man is glancing at his scales on which the truck is setting. The noise from the stick causes the chickens to fly around inside the trailer (instead of roosting) and raises the scales several hundred pounds!

There is another trucker named Squirrely Sullivan whom we shall pay tribute to here. Squirrely is an independant driver who will haul anything. He hails from the great state of Mississippi and is known to pull some real doozies. For instance, one morning when it was pitch dark, his rear tire blew out and he noticed that he had no jack. His wife had removed it to use as a door stop. Squirrely didn't fret, though. He knew he could flag down a car or truck and borrow

one. However, he was on a seldom traveled back road and the cars and trucks were few. He stood beside the road waving at the few who approached him only to watch them whiz by him. He decided that they must not be seeing him and also decided to stand in the middle of the highway when he saw another car approaching him. Undoubtedly, the driver didn't notice Squirrely until it was almost too late and, in order to miss him, pulled his car into a deep ditch, smashing the front end of his brand new Pontiac! Squirrely ran to the window of the smashed vehicle, hit on the window and when the dazed driver finally succeeded in lowering the window, asked: "Hey, buddie! You got a jack I can borrow?"

The last I heard from ol' Squirrely Sullivan was that he was recuperating very nicely at home from the injuries inflicted by the driver of the Pontiac.

Not one single night passes without someone calling me from somewhere in the world praising some truck driver for some outstanding good deed he has performed on their behalf. It would be very hard to imagine the number of lives that have been saved due to the action of the trucker. I can verify dozens of cases where women were stalled in the snow in the middle of the night and only a trucker would take the time to stop and render aid and volunteering his precious time, made certain that the victims of the night and cold were safely on their way. Many truckers, again verified by those he helped, have driven many miles out of their way to transport some nearly frozen traveler to a motel while he, the Knight of the Road, made certain his stalled car was taken good care of by turning the problem over to some mechanic in the city.

When I hear of Buck Birchfield, Windham, Frank Rich, Joe West, Shorty Steel, John, Beecher and Alice, Ivan Lamb, Hoss Gates and the hundreds of others that I have either talked with by telephone or met in person, I know I am among real pals. Fellows like Jess, Tom, Barnie, Stokes, Jones and the like make losing sleep worthwhile.

I am lucky and very proud to have the trucker as my friend.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I first met Adrian Proctor, a very proper Englishman who was studying radio at Elkins in Dallas, on a Spring night in 1969. At first, I thought he was putting me on with his very, very English accent. I was to find out, however, that Adrian was for real. He was probably the most real person who ever participated in my show.

Adrian was twenty two years of age and was from London. His mother was very agreeable in his coming to the states to study radio and he was to become a real friend during the months he was with us.

Adrian was not a very good announcer. As a matter of fact, I thought his future in broadcasting was hopeless . . . at least here in the states . . . since people were always calling and complaining that they couldn't understand what the Englishman was saying. What Adrian lacked in diction, he made up for in a very cool, drawl English personality and was a complete reversal of anything else, especially the music and Texas accents, heard on my show. Adrian also had an almost uncontrollable crush on Loretta Lynn and was to meet her before returning to London.

One Saturday night I decided to take Adrian to my television show at Panther Hall with me and it turned out to be one of the most hectic nights I had spent at the ballroom, due to a few unexpected antics performed by the Englishman. After the television show, Adrian accompanied several of us across the street to Panther Hall Annex where we were going to listen to Wynn Stewart. We listened to Wynn for a couple of hours and noticed that a lady, who had had too much hootch to drink, was giggling at Adrian's accent and making fun of his curly hair and English clothing. I also noticed that the lady resembled the great star, Minnie Pearl, in the face (only in the face). I decided I would pull a "funny" on my friend from London and, when the lady had returned to the bar for another beer, I whispered to Adrian: "Do you know who that lady was who was standing by us awhile ago?"

"I have no earthly idea," replied the gentleman.

"That, Adrian, was Cousin Minnie Pearl!" I lied.

"You must be fooling" Exclaimed Adrian. "Do you mean the lady who has the chicken houses all over America?" (he was refering

to the Minnie Pearl Fried Chicken places.)

"That's her!" I said.

Without saying another word, Adrian walked up to the lady at the bar, punched her gently in the middle of her back and, when she turned her wobbly, dizzy head toward him he said in his most perfect English, "I hate to disturb you m' dear lady, but I just had to let you know that I eat in your chicken house quite often!"

The not-so-proper lady punched Adrian in the nose with her fist!

Adrian returned to our crowd holding his nose and said, in a near whisper, "She is a temperamental creature, isn't she? I say . . . would you mind getting her autograph for me? I'm afraid our personalities clash. I am fond of her chicken!"

This was my first real encounter with the complete honesty of Adrian Proctor and my conscience hurt me for taking advantage of it.

One warm summer night my old truck drivin' buddy, Joe West, was in town and "ready to roar"! We decided to take Adrian Proctor "snipe" hunting. Adrian, of course, was to hold the bag while Joe, Big Tilda, Maybelle and I chased the snipe to him. He practiced the call of the fictitious bird ("Bop! Cop! Bop! Cop!") for over thirty miles in the enclosed car while we were searching for a pasture. Our nerves were getting worn from the "Bop! Cops!" that Adrian was practicing and we were tempted to call the whole thing off when we discovered an isolated spot near Mansfield, Texas. Old Joe gave Adrian a few phoney instructions on snipe hunting, informing him that he was to stand under an appointed tree with a flashlight and open bag while the rest of us chased the snipe toward the bag. Adrian was ready! "Bop! Cop! Bop! Cop!" he screeched.

Before the night had ended, about three hours later, Maybell had returned to the car, Big Tilda ran into a cow, almost causing serious injury . . . to the cow, I ran into a thorn shrouded tree and Joe West fell into a huge pit filled with beer cans and old wine bottles. In the far distance, standing under the old tree with a flashlight and open bag, stood Adrian, still fresh and alert, doing his "Bop! Cop! Bop! Cop!"

As we were driving toward Fort Worth, nursing our injuries from the snipe hunt, the only unscratched and unharmed member of

the hunting party, Adrian Proctor, announced in a loud voice, "I say . . . that was jolly fun! It's a shame we caught no snipe! Shall we try again in the near future?" Before we could answer him he continued, "Perhaps it was a faulty call I was doing! I'll keep practicing! Bop! Cop! Bop! Cop! Cop!"

The entire snipe hunt was recorded on a tape machine we hid in the tree. It's a treasure.

Another truck driver who was always in for a little fun when he arrived in Fort Worth was Beecher Wyatt. He and his wife, Alice, hauled produce out of Florida and became very close friends of mine. Beecher loved his wife, his job, his friends and the world. However, he could never understand Adrian Proctor.

After we had been up all night doing the radio show, Beecher and I decided upon another little "joke" we could pull on the all-trusting Englishman. It was 5:30 in the morning and we informed Adrian that we knew a beautiful girl who wanted to meet him and have a spot of tea along with a bit of chit-chat with him. Adrian, of course, was ready to meet this tantalizing fan and, at 5:30 in the morning, jumped into the car with Beecher and me. We drove him to the west side of Fort Worth and into one of the city's most exclusive residential areas where we circled blocks of houses, searching for one with the houselights on. We finally located a well lit house and informed Adrian that this was the place for his tea and chit-chat.

"Are you sure these people want me?" He asked.

"Definitely," chimed Beecher and me. "Just go to the door, ring the bell and inform the girl that you are Adrian Proctor and that you've come for tea and chit-chat."

Adrian climbed out of my car and walked slowly toward the house in the quiet darkness of the Texas morning. Beecher was trying to hold back his laughter and I was already beginning to worry about the outcome of our prank as I noticed the little Englishman bravely ring the doorbell of the strange house. In a few seconds we see the door to the house opened and we saw a lady in the doorway. We also saw Adrian nodding his head, smiling and, although we couldn't detect his words, noticed that he was carrying on a bit of conversation with the lady. Beecher was bent over in laughter and I, too, was getting a small charge out of the situation now that it appeared Adrian was out of any danger. Since I had to record my

COUNTRY CROSSROADS show, I was anxious for Adrian to return to the car. Instead, the door to the house opened and Adrian stepped inside!

After an hour had passed and Adrian had still not returned I began to worry. Perhaps some jealous husband had put my little friend away. Also, I was already late for the taping of COUNTRY CROSSROADS. I noticed that Beecher's convulsive laughter had stopped and he was snoring in the front seat with his mouth wide open.

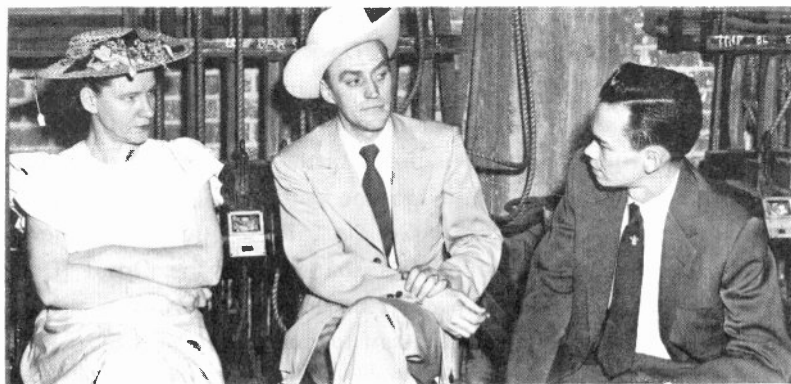
After an hour and twenty minutes had drooped by, I saw the door to the house open and Adrian walk out. He was smiling as he walked toward the car. He turned toward the house and waved, opened the car door, seated himself and said: "She was a jolly nice lady!"

I was speechless.

Beecher awoke and seemed astonished in noting that Adrian had made it back to the car in one piece. He had expected (and secretly hoped, I believe) some jealous husband to teach our English friend a "lesson in messin". Beecher asked Adrian what had happened in the strange house and Adrian informed him that the lady had fixed him a "spot of tea" as he had requested, showed him pictures of her grandchildren and they had spent over an hour comparing the ways of England and America.

"It was jolly fun!" Exclaimed Adrian. "She wants me to come and have Sunday dinner with her!"

Beecher and I remained silent as we drove toward the recording studios for my late appointment.



MINNIE PEARL, RUSTY GABBARD, Wichita Falls

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

I am as big a fan of the Grand Ol' Opry today as I was whenever I used to sit up with my dad until midnight on Saturdays during my childhood and hear such favorites as The Solemn Ol' Judge, Uncle Dave Macon and his son, Doris, The Possum Hunters, Sam & Kirk McGee, The Fruit Jar Drinkers and the many other big names that added so much to our Saturday nights. Later came Roy Acuff and his Smokey Mountain Boys, Ernest Tubb, Bill Monroe, Hank Williams, Cousin Minnie Pearl, etc. Names that represented showmanship in our industry. I'm still amazed and stand in awe when I watch announcer Grant Turner in action on the Grand Ol' Opry stage. He's the "Dean" of the country music announcers and, in my estimation, has earned a cherished place of honor in our Country Hall of Fame. Do you realize that his is the most heard voice on the Grand Ol' Opry?

Except for one night during a racial scare, the Opry hasn't missed a single "live" performance in over 40 years. How many times have you heard the Stevens Work Clothes jingle ("Just a little bigger . . . Just a little better!") by Roy Acuff and Brother Oswalt? And how about "You'll bake right . . . with Martha White!" These are the sounds of Saturday.

I believe witnessing the Grand Ol' Opry in action is a true test of the honesty and sincerity of a country disk jockey. When he sees the informal attitude of the big show he will either consider it a masterpiece of "tell-it-like-it-is" country programming or will walk away with an "it was strictly cornball" attitude. It astonishes many newcomers to watch Junior Husky discussing a fishing trip with Stonewall Jackson while Skeeter Davis is singing "Something Precious" on the WSM microphone. They may be standing less than ten feet from her. It's not uncommon to see Bob Luman walk on stage and borrow a guitar pick from Little Jimmy Dickens in full view of the audience while Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys are "knockin' 'em out" with "Sally Goodin". These informal acts never bother the performer. He realizes that this is the Opry! They wouldn't have it any other way. It began with informality and no one has ever given any serious thought to changing it.

As of this writing, plans are for the Opry to move into it's new

home in 1972. They will, however, take with them many of the historic and almost sacred material ingredients such as the old church pews, windows, stage, etc. that have now become a part of America's proud belongings. If you are a true country music fan, have you ever wondered what effect it would have on you to hear or read an announcement stating that the Grand Ol' Opry had been permanently closed? To me it would be like closing a part of Saturday night!

One night, not too long ago, I was allowed to stand on the stage of the Opry after the audience and the performers had left the old building. Only a couple of cleanup men were in the auditorium. I could almost feel the presence of some of the "greats" as I stood on the same old stage that boasted them for years! George Haye, The Solemn Old Judge, with his makeshift steamboat whistle announcing, "It's Grand Ol' Opry time! Let 'er go boys!" . . . Hank Williams encoring time after time while singing "Lovesick Blues" and seeing the actual hurt in his eyes as he sang "Why Should We Try Anymore" . . . Jim Reeves adding a touch of mellow sophistication by singing "Welcome To My World" . . . Cowboy Copus "bringing down the house" with "Filipino Baby" . . . Patsy Cline showing true talent with "I Fall To Pieces" . . . Jack Anglin with his buddy Johnny Wright spotlighting real country with "Poison Love" . . . Rod Brasfield was there, funnier than ever, and always taking the time to talk to the fan or disk jockey backstage after his bit . . . Uncle Dave Macon could be seen and heard with his old banjo . . . Ira Louvin was supplying outstanding country harmony with his brother, Charlie . . . Hawkshaw Hawkins, The Delmore Brothers, Texas Ruby, "Doctor" Lew Childre and many others who have gone on still live in the old Opry House. They, too, will move to the new home.

Nashville has always been my second home. I love to visit Music City, USA for several reasons. As I said, I am a great fan of country music and still get a tremendous thrill out of watching some of my favorites perform. I love to be with them. I have always found the country entertainer to be more humble and sincere than in other phases of show business and I presume that this is because they . . . or at least most of them . . . come from humble roots. I have seen a few become clouded with false greatness but, all in all, 90% of our people are genuine.

Nothing burns me faster than to hear someone who is strictly uninformed rattle off on the bad habits and low morals of the country music entertainer. I've always attributed this to the fact that a great many of our country songs are based on drinking and running around and I believe that a large percentage of the radio listeners and record buyers take the singer seriously. It is somewhat similar to the image left by some of the more popular movie actors and actresses. For instance, do you know of many people who refer to Humphrey Bogart as a "nice guy?" He's remembered mostly as a "tough guy" by his fans when, actually, he was a nice guy according to those who knew him.

I'm very fortunate to have met practically every artist in country music during my years in the business and I'm even more fortunate to be able to refer to practically all of them as true friends. I must defend my friends in country music whenever I hear or read about their "excessive drinking problems", "narcotics problems" and "marital problems". Granted, just as in all walks of life and in all professions, country music has it's share of those engulfed with problems such as those I just mentioned. Several artists have openly admitted to having had narcotic and drinking problems and, having "kicked" the problem, put their reputation on the line and publicly announce that they were "hooked". More important, they utilize their bad mistakes to discourage others from making the same mistakes.

I'm proud to be a friend of Roger Miller and Johnny Cash. I've known them both for over a dozen years. I knew them when they were beginning in show business, when they hit for the first time, when they had their problems with the "pills", when they dropped in popularity because of their problems and when they made their "comeback". The "comeback" is what really makes me proud of them. They have proven that with faith in God, determination and by listening to the advise of the right people, bad habits can be licked. I know that Roger and Johnny will not mind my using them as an example. I have a good reason for spotlighting them. You'll find no two more respected and admired men in show business than Rog and John. Their record selling strength in internationally known. However, their inner strength . . . the strength that is most obvious . . . is where it really counts. That's what makes them "stars" in my

books!

Most of the real problem people in country music are those who try to capitalize on it and draw blood from it's popularity when, deep down, they could care less about the music, the stars or those behind the scenes people who try to keep our industry in the right vein. I detest, for instance, the "fast-buck" phonies who advertise that they will "make you a star" . . . for a price. I've seen this happen several times. I've seen these crooks take the honest money of some poor chump who was so desperate to get on records that they would hock their car, home and furniture in order to raise the money to pay the thief who had neither faith in the singer or intentions of helping make him a star. I met one man last year who had cashed his mother's insurance policy to raise a thousand dollars to pay one of these cold blooded crooks to release a record that was unbelievably bad! Not only did he pay to have a record released . . . he signed a management contract with the money grabber giving him 50% of the money received by the sucker on personal appearances (just in case the inferior record should hit)! Of course, the person who falls for this kind of under-handed thievery is a great deal to blame because of the fact that he forks over the money to keep the dishonest one in business.

These blood stealers generally follow the same pattern of operation. They will advertise that they are "looking for talent" for a record label and announce that auditions will be held at a certain place and at a certain time. As Jimmy Durante said . . . "Everybody wants to get into the act!" You would be surprised at the amount of people who secretly harbor a desire to get into show business! How many times have you heard yourself sing in the shower and whisper to yourself: "Hey, that's pretty good!" See? Anyway, dozens of people may show up for the announced "auditions" with prepared songs to sing before the king! It doesn't take the great discoverer long to know who has the loot and who doesn't have the loot. Those who have "money to spare" will pass the audition while those who barely had gasoline money to get to the scene of the action are told, in no uncertain and cold terms, to "get lost"! The cheat will then tell the singer (with the money, of course) that he is proud to announce that he or she is being considered for his record label since he or she shows great promise! ("You sounded great, baby!" . . . "Man, you're

another Hank Williams! Where have you been hiding?") This is usually followed, within a very few seconds, with the inquiry: "Do you have any money to 'promote' your record?" He then informs the excited "newcomer" that it will require approximately a thousand dollars from the singer to "promote" the up-and-coming hit and get it into the hands of disk jockeys. They usually assure the ball of talent that they can "guarantee" plays on some of the top disk jockey's shows "because they are personal friends" of his! Many of these enthusiastic babes of ignorance then begin to fork over their life savings, anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000, whereby the crook has a few hundred records pressed at a cost to him of approximately \$100. The records seldom get into the hands of the disk jockeys due to the fact that most of the honest jocks are hip to the huskster and won't have anything to do with either him or his crooked label. You never hear the records on the air, except in extreme cases where the poor fish personally tossed it into the hands of an extra warm hearted d.j. who just couldn't stand to see the tears from the loser, and you'll never find the record for sale or on display at a reputable record shop. The records are then tossed into the hands of the loser who gives them to relatives and friends as "gifts" and announces that he is "dropping show business". The thief, meantime, counts his hundreds of dollars profit from the sucker, buys an ad announcing his next audition session for his record label and goes on to the next desperate "star of tomorrow" who may show no talent but a lot of green stuff he is willing to give away. Believe me . . . the singer (?) is doing just that! He is giving away his savings to one of the most cold-blooded wheeler-dealers to be found (and his contracts, unfortunately, keep him within the boundaries of the law). He is, in my estimation, worse than a safe cracker. The safe cracker breaks into a safe. This crumb breaks into, steals from and destroys the human heart!

Running neck-in-neck with the record shark is the Song Poems money grabber. You've seen his ads, I'm sure. He advertises "SONG POEMS WANTED", following this big announcement with such nauseating nonsense as the ballyhoo that he is looking for song poems that he can "set to music" and that he will be happy to inspect your poems free. I've known over a dozen people who fell for this come-on and everyone, without exception, received the same

reply from the bogus agent after they had sent their poems to him for inspection. All replies were on the order of: "Congratulations! We have found your poem to be of exceptional promise and are willing to set it to music and send you an acetate (disc) recording of the finished product for only (the amount the hood charges will vary). It's usually between 50 to 150 dollars. The monetary damage, should anyone fall for the crook's phony offer, is bad enough. However, the damage that it could do to the hopes and dreams of a truly promising writer is even more serious! These men have no knowledge of the country music industry, generally, and even less concern for the feelings or pocketbooks of those who feed them. Just like the record hi-jacker, the song poem robber stays within the boundaries of the law in his contracts and promises.

To test this special kind of road agent, I sent some of the worst lyrics I could dream of to one of them after reading his ad in a magazine. I was sure that after he read the horrible junk I had mailed him he would catch on to the fact that it was fake. Here are the actual lyrics I mailed to Mr. Song Poems Wanted:

I saw a bird up in a tree this morning,
The bird was crying down at me at dawning,
I asked him why he was crying there,
Instead of flying in the air,
And he told me that my love was gone, I'm moaning

Mother said that I could go and see,
The little girl who really cared for me,
So I took a ship and went to see,
If my darling cared for me,

She said she did and I'm so glad that the bird told me so.

Within three weeks I received a letter of "encouragement" from the song expert which screeched: "Congratulations! Your poem shows great promise and our board of experts have chosen it for one of the very few we are submitting to a New York music publisher. We will be happy to furnish you with a recording of the complete works, including our musical accompaniment, for only \$150.00! We must have your money within ten days in order to pursue what could be the most rewarding accomplishment of your life!"

I wrote them a letter of thanks and notified them that since

they had found such promise in my works and since I was financially at a low ebb and couldn't afford the \$150.00, I was going to hitchhike to Nashville and try to get a spot on the Grand Ol' Opry. I also notified them that I had met Stonewall Jackson in Amarillo a couple of years before and that I was sure he would help me out when I reached Nashville. I closed the letter with a big hearted offer of giving them 50% of the song for \$75.00.

I never heard from them.

One of the most frustrating periods of my life occurred during the late 60s when I turned one of my most promising songs, DRINKING CHAMPAGNE, over to a Dallas music publisher who promised me the moon. After the contracts had been signed, the publisher, who was completely lost in the game of publishing and promotion, sat on his backside and did absolutely nothing that he told me he would do. As a matter of fact, he lost interest in the song before it had hardly been recorded (it has been recorded by over a dozen artists since I turned it over to Acuff-Rose in Nashville) and informed me that it was a "bomb", that he had no intention of spending any money on it for promotion (which he didn't) and that he would not, under any circumstances, return the song to me to place in the hands of someone who knew what they were doing. The only thing I received from these shady characters was a hard time and a few insults. Finally, my lawyer, Marshall Hines, took the "wonder boys" into court and not only got the song out of their pockets but the money they owed me.

This act taught me a great lesson in song publishing. All of my material now is put in the capable hands of such honest companies as Acuff-Rose, House Of Cash (Johnny's publishing company) and the many others that occupy Music Row in Nashville. The little ding-a-ling outfits, such as I had the bad experience with, have no concept of direction when the chips are down in the big business of music. They'll promise you the moon and deliver you a flashlight . . . if they deliver at all.



With my Little Buddie CONNIE SMITH,
"I think I love this girl!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Girl singers have always amazed me with the fact that they can keep up with the pace of show business. While the boys in the biz look beat, the girls, keeping the same hectic schedule, look fresh and beautiful! Of course, I realize that Max Factor has a hand in a great portion of this! Man can cover the skin . . . but, unfortunately, not the feelings of some of the ravishing females of country music! I've worked closely with most of these ladies and must admit that, outside of maybe two or three, have found them to be exactly that. Ladies.

The old show business adage, "the bigger they are, the nicer", certainly holds true in the case of the girl warblers. I worked for awhile with a girl who was just beginning in country music. She had a husband and some teenagers at home and still, in her early thirties, was determined to "make it big in the business and to heck with the husband and kids!"

She hired a manager who signed her to some impossible contracts, a band, a baby-sitter and hit the road to what she was certain would be "sure stardom". As I said, I worked quite a few show dates with the determined doll and, within a year, I watched the nerves begin to shatter within both her husband and herself. She would publicly humiliate and insult the husband with such orders as, "Get out of here! I'm talking business, stupid!" or "Get me something to drink! And hurry!" or "See if the band is ready! Hurry it up!" I noticed that she found it difficult to smile or display any genuine regard for her fans.

Unfortunately, the girl never made it. I don't believe she has a chance because of her fight within herself. It's taken all of her strength. She appears to have aged ten years in the two that I've known her and continues to ride the same lost train to potential stardom by ignoring her family and her morals. She shows no appreciation or loyalty and changes managers every few days, blaming them for her obvious mistakes. She has built herself, in her mind, into an entertainment giant while, realistically, she is an obvious and hopeless failure.

Don't try to guess who the girl is. She never lived in Nashville or appeared on the "Grand Ol' Opry". She's a heartbreaking example of

what can happen when anyone leaves all ends loose. I don't believe anyone can put any business before God and family and succeed. They may succeed for awhile but it's always a very short while. This lady (?), already in her 30s, is still trying, blindly, to get her foot in the door. It ends up most of the time in her mouth!

My hat is off to the grand ladies of country music. I would estimate that at least 90% of the girls you hear on records representing our industry are well adjusted, both emotionally and physically, for the business.

I must tell you about Constance June (Connie) Smith here.

Admittedly, there has been some talk about this 5 ft. 1 inch, 105 pound blonde and me. Every night on my radio show someone will ask: "Do you love Connie Smith?" To deny that I love old "Supermouth" would be a lie. However, I'm no exception. To know Connie as she really is, is to love her. She is a twice divorced, devoted mother of two who is a dynamo of energy and a bundle of talent. I've considered her the greatest female singer since her first RCA release, "ONCE A DAY".

You learn to love "Sunshine" Smith even more whenever you see her standing in church and singing "HOW GREAT THOU ART" or giving her testimony of her belief in God. Connie doesn't claim to be an angel and will almost knock you down if you give her credit that she feels belongs to God. She's not ashamed to speak up for Christ when invited. As a matter of fact, I've known of her speaking up for Him several times when she wasn't invited!

I had known Connie as an entertainer for quite some time. I began knowing the real Connie Smith shortly after the 1969 Disk Jockey Convention in Nashville. I was going "great guns", professionally. I was doing my radio show on 50,000 watt WBAP, was considered by the trade magazines to be one of the nation's top country disk jockeys, was doing a nationally syndicated television show with Buck Owens, a local TV show from Panther Hall in Fort Worth - Dallas, my song compositions were going good ("Drinking Champagne", which I composed while driving home from a Fort Worth golf course, had hit the national "Best Seller" charts and was being recorded by some of the top names in the business), I had signed a new recording contract with a major label. I was doing a nationally syndicated radio show, "Country Crossroads", with Leroy

Van Dyke for the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission that was being heard on over 350 radio stations each week, was making good money on personal appearances . . . and I was miserable!

I was standing in the lobby of the old Andrew Jackson Hotel in Nashville being interviewed by my good friend Ralph Emery on WSM when, in the depth of my personal misery, my eyes caught the eyes of Constance June. It seems she had invaded the Emery show that night and was helping Ralph with his interviews (she still springs in on Ralph's show from time to time, I understand). Her eyes stared through me and I knew that she sensed my misery even though I was putting up what I thought was a jovial front while talking with Emery. It was then, while she stared at my emptiness, that I caught my first glimpse of the new and happy little singer. I had known her a couple of years before and she wasn't very happy at the time (she'll tell you now . . . "That was before I got Jesus!") and she must have seen a little of the old Connie in me. Anyway, I decided that I would like a little dose of whatever it was that was making her happy. I was reluctant to ask and it was several weeks before I tracked Connie down and began a serious, and what was eventually to amount to a very valuable, friendship.

* Connie met me for lunch one day in Nashville and I asked her for a date that night. I had heard she wasn't going out with men and was astonished when she told me that she would "go out" with me that night. There was a small catch, however. She wanted to take me to church with her! It seems that Jimmie Snow (Hank's son) was holding a youth revival on the outskirts of Nashville and Connie was going to sing. I could go if I wanted to - she was going, anyway - was the attitude of our "date" that night. I decided to give it a whirl. After all, that was the only way I could be with "Sunshine" and, besides, I might get a chance to see if she was "for real" in her religion. If memory serves me right, I had hidden doubts about her sincerity.

I'm a Baptist and this was my first visit to an Assembly Of God Church. What I saw, with Connie in the middle of them, was a lot of shouting, hand-clapping, rejoicing to God kind of people. It was most obvious to me that they, Connie included, were happy. I walked out of the service before it was over and glanced at the Tennessee moon.

I can still hear the singing and shouting that emanated from that little church on that beautiful summer night and Connie's voice, above most of the rest, singing "NEVER ALONE". It was also plain, so very plain to see that my little friend, Connie Smith, though still single, maritally, is truly never alone.

Our friendship is among my greatest treasures. It's a God-given kind of friendship. I can't help lovin' "Supermouth" Smith, her sweet little Mama from Ohio and two precious boys. As I said earlier, however, I'm no exception. You would love her, too, if you knew the real Constance June.

It was a beautiful summer morning in 1970 and I had just completed my all night Open Road Show on WBAP when I began taking a small inventory of my life in general and, as I mentioned, although everything was going in my favor, professionally, there was a tremendous wasteland of emptiness.

Words and melody to a song began to form in my mind and I couldn't seem to shake it! I got my guitar out of my car, went into the WBAP recording room and, without writing the words down on paper, put my newly written song on tape. I've always referred to this song as my special favorite of all of the tunes I have written. It's a sort of prayer for the seeking man. Each time I hear the song my memory goes back to that beautiful . . . but lonely . . . summer morning:

CLINGING TO A SAVING HAND

Words & Music by Bill Mack

Published by The House Of Cash (BMI)

Sing me a song of Praise and Glory,
Help this wonderin' child to understand,
That when I close my eyes in sleep eternal,
I'll be clinging to a Saving Hand.

I want you to sing me about the Rock of Ages,
Sing about eternity so sweet,
So that when I take my last breath of life,
I'll awaken at my Savior's Feet.

I want you to sing me about Paul and Matthew,
Sing about my Dear Savior's birth,
And tell about His trials and tribulations,
As He walked upon this heathen earth.

Sing me a song of Praise and Glory,
Help this wonderin' child to understand,
That when I close my eyes in sleep eternal,
I'll be clinging to a Saving Hand.

I took the tape off the machine, put it into a box and mailed it directly to Connie Smith. Somehow, I felt that she was the one to sing the song on record the way I wanted it performed.

Connie was the first to record "CLINGIN' TO A SAVING HAND" and I was proud of her performance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I have intentionally saved the best for the last.

Wilda Irene Smith and Ernest Raymond Smith are two good people from the Panhandle of Texas who have spent most of their lives being ideal and absolutely devoted parents to two somewhat different sons. One son, the elder, became a country music entertainer while the younger son became a teacher of the gospel. The younger son, the gospel worker, could be found on Sundays behind the pulpit of the Baptist church leading the congregation in their favorite hymns while the elder son could be found on Sunday nights singing the top country songs of the day in some night club. Incidentally, both brothers had the same starting time.

No one has been blessed with finer parents than those that my brother, Clois, and I claim. They are, as I said, ideal. I'm afraid that I have never shown the appreciation that I should for them.

My mother has been the victim of my practical jokes for as long as I can remember. However, the ol' gal is pretty handy with them herself. We've always had fun together and I've always considered my dad to be the luckiest man in the world to have a wife like mom. She's not only understanding and beautiful, she's one of the most amusing people I've ever been around, considering the fact that she has had her share of surgery and illness. To say I love her would be a tremendous understatement.

My dad is one of the most devoted Christian men that I've ever known. I am one man who can say that he has never heard his dad speak a word of profanity. He practices his Christianity seven days a week. He, too, is a barrel of fun and will give the shirt off his back to a friend in need. He is a contender on the golf course and will pick up a suitcase, meet you at the air terminal and travel with you anywhere you want to go anytime you're ready to leave town. He loves to travel.

I've never heard my mother and dad argue. They truly love each other . . . and they have proven a thousand times how much they love their sons. I know that I can call them anytime, day or night, and they will be on their way to Fort Worth within a few minutes. They have been tested on this fact many times.

My mother has never accepted the fact that my brother and I

have grown up. I believe this is a common factor with most mothers. However, mom is exceptional in this bit of lack of realism. She worries about my staying up all night doing the radio show. She worries if I lose five pounds of weight. She is also nosey when she comes to visit me! By nosiness, I mean she checks to see what I have to eat in the refrigerator and inspects the cabinets for any bottles of the hard stuff. She also checks my closets to make certain my clothes are in order. She will insist that I come home (Pampa, Texas) to visit them and rest up ("Come home, darlin', and let mama take care of you. I'll fix you ham and blackeyed peas and you can sleep as long as you like.") However, my mom is somewhat like a registered nurse. I'll go home and, sure enough, she will bulge me with her great home cooking. I don't get an over abundance of sleep, though, due to the fact that she awakens me every morning at 7:30 or 8 o'clock to inform me "it's time for breakfast!" Mom is always determined to put weight on me. My average weight is 160 pounds. If I drop five pounds, Mom is likely to hold me down and feed me! She is absolutely obsessed with my weight! I wouldn't trade her for the world. She has given me that precious gift of love.

In many ways, my dad is even more ignorant of the fact that my brother and I have grown up than mom is! I hope I don't embarrass Pop here when I say that he still kisses my brother and I hello, goodbye and good-night! He's as much a man as I've ever known but he looks upon his two sons as two little boys. When it comes to Pop, I suppose we are little boys. He is, without a doubt, the most loving and understanding man I've ever known. I only hope a little of his great storehouse of goodness rubs off on me! The most beautiful picture of Pop is when I see him standing behind the pulpit on Sundays leading the little church in gospel songs. Pop is a Baptist deacon and has been music director for many years.

Pop is also hard of hearing and this has caused him lots of embarrassment and has caused me a few laughs. For instance, when Pop had his service station in Shamrock, a trucker whose wife had been in the hospital stopped by for a fill-up and Pop asked him how his wife was doing. "Not very good, Ernest", said the trucker. Pop, who hates to admit he doesn't hear too well, smiled and said: "That's good. I'm glad to hear it!" Naturally, the trucker was amazed at Pop's statement. I happened to overhear the mixed up conversation

and, as the trucker was leaving, informed my dad what the trucker had said. Pop chased him outside the station to apologize, finally admitting that he hadn't heard him correctly.

The family has wondered about how many similar conversations we didn't catch and how many wrong impressions may have been formed by Pop's hearing problem.

As I said, my mother and dad have fallen victim to countless practical jokes performed by me.

My mother has a terrible fear of tornados. My brother and I could always depend on mom awakening us several times during the "tornado season" announcing that it was "time to go to the dug-out!" I can still smell the kerosene lamp in the stuffy old storm cellar that harbored mom's canned peas and peaches. It also harbored numerous centipedes, scorpions, spiders and, usually, a snake or two. We had our choice . . . being demolished by the threatening tornado or being bitten by a snake. Mom always chose the storm cellar.

One summer night amidst the sound of roaring thunder, small hailstones began falling on our front yard. Mom, Pop and the elderly couple next door were watching the storm nearing Shamrock. Strangely, mom hadn't announced "dug-out time". Instead, she seemed to be hypnotized by the falling hailstones that were no larger than peas. I struck upon an idea that I was certain would bring a little life into the dull night. My little brother and I took an ice pick and removed a huge chunk of ice from the 25 pound block that mom always kept wrapped in a flannel blanket in the hall. The chunk must have weighed five pounds. We sneaked to near the front yard and tossed the huge chunk over the house where it landed in the front yard along with the pea-sized hailstones, leaving the impression that it had fallen from the sky. Mom went berserk!

"Look at that hailstone!" She screamed.

Pop braved the elements to recover the icy monster and before my bud and I could admit being the hail makers mother was on the telephone calling all of her friends around town inviting them over to view the huge, strangely shaped "hailstone". Pop had placed the thing in the freezer in order to avoid it's melting a single drop and the elderly couple had telephoned a representative of the Shamrock Texan. Within minutes the house was filled with awe-stricken admirers, some taking pictures to send to friends and relatives around

the world. The rep. from the Shamrock Texan was also shooting pictures. Mother asked if the heat from the flashbulbs would cause melting. She was very proud of the chunk. "Thank goodness it didn't land on the roof! And what if it had landed on somebody's head? Thank the Good Lord!"

Visitors came for several days to get a brief look at the monster. Mom would take it out of the freezer for a short period of time to avoid melting. Finally, it dawned on some do-gooder that the chunk was not the correct color or shape to be a hailstone and, after some questioning, I admitted being the culprit. Mom didn't use the flyswatter on me (her usual weapon). She broke up in laughter when she realized how ridiculous the situation was.

Pop used the hailstone in his ice tea at supper that night.

Mom had a cousin whom she hadn't seen since she was a child. He was a welder and was visiting my Uncle John, mom's brother, in Fort Worth at the same time my dad and mom were visiting me. Uncle John invited my parents over to his house to renew acquaintances with the long lost cousin and mom was looking forward to seeing him again. They had been very close as children. I had already met the cousin and his family and noticed that his eyes were extremely red due to years of welding. Another "great" idea for a joke entered my mind. As mom was putting the finishing touches on her make-up I asked in a calm voice: "You're sure that Cousin Doug's handicap won't upset you, aren't you, mom?"

"What's wrong with him?" She asked.

"I thought you knew! Didn't Uncle John tell you? He is blind!"

Mom was shocked. She yelled at my dad, who was in the next room, "Doug is blind!"

Pop replied: "Good"

Mom, irritated at Pop's deafness, put more power in her voice.

"I said Doug is blind!"

Pop finally got the message and I hit upon another idea to add to the impending visit. "He's also deaf!"

"Oh, no" screamed Mom. She yelled at Pop, again. "Doug is also deaf!"

"Anytime you say," was Pop's reply. It was obvious that he was ad-libbing out of the fact that he had not understood what Mom had said. She finally reached Pop on the fact that her cousin was both

blind and deaf.

"I know this is a shock to you, mom." I said, "Maybe you'd rather not see him."

Mom said that she just "had" to see the poor cousin although she dreaded it. I prompted Mom and Pop on the fact that if they spoke as loud as they could the cousin would understand most of their words.

As we entered Uncle John's, Mom and Pop were prepared for the ordeal of facing poor, "helpless" Cousin Doug. Doug was seated in a large chair in the living room, his wife was seated on the couch and his children were playing in the floor.

"Is that you, Irene?" Asked the cousin, meaning, of course, that he hadn't seen her since childhood and didn't recognize her. Mom thought his "blindness" had caused him to ask the question.

Mom ran to him, grabbed his hand, kissed him on the cheek and screamed (to penetrate his "deaf" ears), "Yes, Doug! This is Irene!" Pop grabbed his hand, clasped it, and yelled, "and I'm Ernest!" The astonished cousin fell back into his seat while his wife, amazed, came to her feet to meet my folks for the first time. My mother hugged her and in a sympathetic tone told her how sorry she was to find out about Doug's condition.

"I have some sort of the same problem," said Pop, referring to his hearing problem.

"Doug has had his "problem" for quite a while," said his wife, referring to Doug's hernia.

Mom and Pop spent most of the evening staring at the cousin with Pop making such audible statements as: "Ain't he pitiful?", "Pore ol' boy!" and "A man never realizes how fortunate he is until he gets in a shape like him!" All of these words of pity were reaching the ears of Cousin Doug and with Mom and Pop gazing into what they thought were his unseeing eyes, the cousin decided it was time for him and his family to excuse themselves. I'm sure he must have also reached the decision that my folks were a little "strange". Uncle John, whom I had informed in the quiet of the kitchen of what I had done, was on the brink of a nervous breakdown and I was wishing I could remedy the out-of-hand situation.

When Cousin Doug and his family arose from their respective seats to leave, Mom grabbed him by the arm and led him toward the

door. "Be careful, honey, here is a chair we need to go around," she said. When they reached the door I heard Mom say to the ill-at-ease relative, "There's a long step here, hold to my arm!" She led Cousin Doug to their waiting car, opened the passenger door for him and, after a tender kiss on the cheek to him, Mom noticed that Cousin Doug had proceeded to move his body under the steering wheel while his wife and kids hurriedly climbed inside the car and slammed the doors. Doug fired up the engine and shoved the transmission into gear. Mom was in shock!

"Honey, are you going to drive?" she asked.

Without saying another word, Cousin Doug and his family whizzed their car into the night. I could hear the screeching of tires many blocks down the street as they retreated from whom, I am sure, they considered the most unusual member of the family tree. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure that the cousin didn't harbor the thoughts that my Mom and Pop may have fallen from a nut tree at sometime. I would love to have heard the conversation that took place between Doug and his wife on their way home.

Uncle John and I were doubled with convulsive laughter. Pop began to laugh, too. Mom didn't speak to me for a week.

Doug and his wife will learn the facts behind that strange night for the first time when (and if) they read it here. I owe them an apology. You, too, Mom.

I know that I have brought my relatives into this book and many may believe that I've strayed from the initial subject, broadcasting. However, my parents have played a huge part in helping me gain what success I have enjoyed in this business. They've always been there when needed. They have encouraged me since my teen-age years when I decided I wanted to make broadcasting my profession. They are the type of people who would have stood behind me regardless of which profession I might have chosen. I must also mention the love and encouragement of my younger brother, Clois. He is not only a dedicated brother . . . he is a great friend. We've always been very close and I'm sure that his prayers have helped me through some very trying moments during my somewhat hectic life. He is also responsible, along with his beautiful wife, Pam, for presenting me with a great little nephew, Andy, and two gorgeous nieces, Laurie and Lisa.

My relatives tell me that I "take after" my Grandpa Sechrist. I hope so. He is one of the strongest men (and one of the most entertaining) that I've ever known. He and Grannie have spoiled me a little throughout my life. They live in Wheeler, Texas with a bunch of my aunts, uncles and cousins. I don't get to see them as often as I would like. However, they know that I love them and, very important to me, I know they all love me. Whenever I want to relax, I take off a few days and "head for the Panhandle of Texas".

My Grannie Sechrist is in the hospital as this book goes into it's final stages. I talked with her the other day by telephone and, although very weak from the many weeks she has been confined to her hospital room, she still displayed the strength that has made her so very important to me.

Until only a few short years ago Grannie would send me her specialty on my birthdays. Gingerbread boys!

Every gingerbread boy was a token of a happy childhood. It's a happiness that's never cooled. Someone once told me . . . "Bill, you'll never grow up!"

Who wants to with a family and relatives like mine?



LISA, LAURIE (my two neices), PAM (my sister-in-law), CLOIS (my brother)
and ANDY (my nephew) - MY IDEA OF A BEAUTIFUL FAMILY

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I'll simply refer to her as Big Tilda, my mythical 298½ pound private secretary.

Big Tilda, as any truck driver or country music fan who has had the pleasure of meeting her knows, is truthfully one of the most beautiful and amazing ladies you'll ever have the pleasure of knowing. Although she may not really send the scales into a rampage, her heart is big enough to park a truck and she was my right arm on the program from its beginning until just a few months ago when circumstances forced her giving up my telephone and returning to more reasonable hours. She still comes around, however, to pay her respects to her friends of the night.

It was Tilda who selected my theme, "The Orange Blossom Special", and answered the telephone on the first night of the show. For a long time, it was just Tilda and me.

Tilda made certain I had plenty of coffee and sandwiches, she made certain that the listeners were given little gifts from the show from time to time (such as record albums) and, most of all, she made certain that as many names were acknowledged as could be acknowledged on a single night. She was a whiz on the telephone and I've seen her take over 200 calls in one night!

I must admit that my girl, Big Tilda, worked harder than anyone who has ever been connected with the show, including, most of all, myself. You'll never realize how many nights we all thought the show was completely out of hand only to have it put back on an even path by the "ol' gal".

She read all of this book before it went to the publisher and her name was hardly mentioned (except while pertaining to the snipe hunt). I'm sure she must have felt a little neglected although she never mentioned the fact. She only kept encouraging me in my writing. Therefore, I'm sneaking this very important portion into my book without her knowing it and she will read it only after the book has hit the market.

To the friend of the trucker, the cop, the waitress and those who work at night, my Big Tilda, may I say with all of the sincerity within me . . . MANY THANKS AND MUCH LOVE, TILDA, FOR HELPING MAKE IT ALL WORTH WHILE . . . AND HELPING MAKE IT ALL POSSIBLE!



Walk in my woods at home with TILDA

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

As I look back upon the many years that I have spent as an announcer, disk jockey, television performer, songwriter and recording artist, I realize that I have been one of the very, very fortunate few. There have been many helping hands along the way, many of whom, I am sure, I will remember after this book goes to press.

In general, I must remember the disk jockeys who taught me a little about developing some kind of style. Men such as Biff Collie, Ralph Emery, Nelson King, Mike Hoyer, Paul Kallenger, Bob Jennings and countless others proved to me that honesty is the best form of presenting a radio or television show. Be yourself! These, in my estimation, are true giants in broadcasting! No radio school or program director gave them their style and talent. It had to be God-given! Men such as Eddy Hill and Slim Willet have contributed more to our brand of music than the world will realize and, as I mentioned before, Grant Turner, in my estimation, deserves a special place in our Country Music Hall of Fame.

Let me also mention my good friend, Mel Foree. Mel has been with Acuff-Rose Music in Nashville for over 25 years and his encouraging words have come at the most needy times during my career.

To say that my broadcasting years would have been happy ones without such greats as Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff, Loretta Lynn, Johnny & Jack, Kitty Wells, Slim Whitman, Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, The Maddox Brothers & Rose, Webb Pierce, Faron Young and the likes would be ridiculous! It was because of the talents of these greats that gave me the fortitude to open my first microphone switch in the studios of KEVA, Shamrock, Texas. It was because of them and many more that I was willing to work for meager salaries and, at times, impossible people who almost made me throw in the towel in the business! It was also because of some of these same people that I decided to "give it another try".

Now . . . the truckers. Although they seldom sing on record, their "Hellos" and bits of conversation on the telephone to me each night from all over the world is true music to my ears! When a burley character is willing to take the time to stop at a cold telephone booth

in Duluth and spend as much as twenty or thirty minutes of his precious time waiting to get a line open to me to ask for a song by Merle Haggard for his wife listening to me in Birmingham, I realize that the late hours are worth it.

Several weeks ago I was informed that a trucker had died of a heart attack behind the wheel of his rig while hauling through Louisiana. As they pulled him from his cab, about three o'clock in the morning, my WBAP radio show was blasting at high volume. I realized that I was his only companion that early morning and the last voice he heard on earth was mine. It's impossible to realize my feeling when I take the time to rationalize the fact. What was I saying when the driver had his fatal attack? Was I joking? Was I playing a top country record about drinking or running around? Or was I playing a gospel song? I'll never know, of course. I do know, however, that every word you say on the air is important. To a devoted listener, a few words can change their minds and ideas toward life. More than a dozen times I've had calls from listeners attempting suicide or desperate for help in some way. I never try to handle the problems, since I realize that I am no expert. I'm only a late night disk jockey. Therefore, I always refer them to someone I am sure will help them (usually someone in the ministry). When these situations arise, it's pretty tough to be funny. However, I keep whirling away whenever I think of the good things that have happened to me such as some of the awards I've received, the important people I have met, when I see a television "salute" such as my friend Roy Eaton did about me on WBAP-TV and, most of all, when the Mayor, R.M. Stovall, proclaimed November 30, 1970 as "Bill Mack Day" in my favorite city, Fort Worth, Texas.

I somehow feel sorry for the fellows starting out in country radio today. They will have better salaries, true, however, they'll miss the days of the Hank Williams Show, Red Foley Show, Johnny Horton Show, Jim Reeves Show, Patsy Cline Show and similar masterpieces of country music programming. Now, when most of the big artists are claiming from \$7,000 to \$40,000 per night it is impossible to see as much talent in the smaller cities as I was blessed to see during my elementary years in radio. There are still a few of the older greats around, however, and lots of newcomers who promise to keep the gap filled.

Country music broadcasting is a fantastic business when handled the way it should be handled. I sincerely believe that it is impossible for a disk jockey to become truly successful in this business if his heart isn't in it. The country music listening audience, more than any other type, can spot a phoney a mile away! If you plan to become a country d.j. with an apologetic approach, forget it! You may make it for awhile . . . but your fans will find you out if you're insincere in your love for our brand. And, believe me, you have to love it!

I believe that the days of "too country" radio are gone. These two words . . . "too country" . . . were dreamed up by Top 40 disc jockeys who entered the country field to make a fast dollar and, if you will notice, most of these insincere masterminds have been found out and are, thank goodness, fading from the scene.

I have always detested the words, "too country". Have you ever heard music put down for being "too rock", "too pop", "too gospel" or "too classical"? Of course not! Our music was only "too country" for some of the phoney fast money grabbers who entered our field during an era when they could no longer make it in the "rock" or "soul" field. Their ears couldn't stand the sound of Webb Pierce, The Louvin Brothers or The Osborn Brothers. However, they loved the sound of the cash register bells while depositing the funds that such artists . . . and I do mean artists . . . were adding to their bankroll.

For those who truly believe in country music and want to make it their profession as a disk jockey, singer, writer or any other phase of it's endless branches, there will be days of lean earnings, old cars, cheap apartments and clothes. There will be many days of discouragement. Unless you hit it big in the beginning . . . and your chances are very slim . . . don't expect your wife to wear furs and big diamonds. However, if she loves you enough . . . and you honestly love country music enough . . . it's well worth the sacrifice! Even if you never make the Cadillac class, you can rest assured of the fact that you'll be hob-nobbing with the best kind of people in entertainment! On the whole, they are a brand of people who will stick with you when you are up and, more important, when you are down. I'm speaking of the performer as well as the listener. Don't ever forget that the country music listener is the most devoted

listener in the world! He knows you better than you think. He can tell by listening to your voice each day or night (I know this for a true fact) how things are at home, if you're having problems of some kind, if you're coming down with a virus . . . or if you're happy! Don't ask me how they know these things . . . I just know they do!

The country music fan prefers to see his disk jockey happy and will go out of his way with words of encouragement, a prayer or two and perhaps, if you're lucky, a few cup cakes that his wife "just happened to bake for you."

Whether the devoted country music fan is a farmer, a nurse, a lawyer, a doctor, a waitress, a policeman or a trucker (there are no restrictions), they are all the same. They love their country music! You'll find their Roy Acuff and Jeannie C. Riley records in the same stack with those by Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra. And why not? Our country artists have class! Their homes in Nashville are just as big and expensive as the homes in Hollywood. There's only one difference. You're liable to be invited into one of the Nashville homes for ham, cornbread and red beans, served with the finest silver, of course, to talk about the business.

Country music has been my life and I've loved practically every minute of it. It's been good to me because I've been around good people that I sincerely love. I only wish I could mention all their names. However, they know who they are! They're a part of the best brand of music in the world!

If, after reading this book by an all night record spinner who has seen his favorite kind of music when it was up, down and finally, back on top, you want to become a country music disk jockey . . .
HERE'S POWER TO YOU! 50,000 WATTS WORTH!



Bill Mack, one of America's top Country-Western Disc Jockeys and favorite of countless thousands of truckers and other nite people, for many years, has not only told his very interesting and exciting life story, complete with many never-before published photographs, he has also filled the pages with stories of fellow Disc Jockeys, country-western stars such as Friend and Idol HANK WILLIAMS, and others he has met along the way. At times so hilariously funny you'll howl with laughter and other times compassionate and tender. "SPINS AND NEEDLES" will be loved and enjoyed by every BILL MACK fan. No "Ghost Writer" wrote this book! As you read it, it is like listening to BILL himself telling you the stories in person.